

# Planning and Development Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6641

AN ACT CONCERNING THE REMOTE AND ONLINE PROVISION OF

**Title:** MUNICIPAL SERVICES.

**Vote Date:** 3/31/2021

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 3/22/2021

**File No.:** 547

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

Planning and Development Committee

### REASONS FOR BILL:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, executive orders allowed for remote and online access to public meetings. This shift, necessary due to protecting public health and safety, has had many positive benefits, including an increase in public engagement. As part of the process to update statutes to allow for flexibility in public meetings, language changes relating to other municipal services, such as information access on town websites, ability to receive documents electronically, and electronic payment are addressed.

### RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None expressed.

### NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Connecticut Association of Boards of Education \(CABE\)](#). CABE submitted written testimony in strong support of Section 2, citing the pandemic as an illustration of why flexibility for how public bodies conduct business safely is important. They note that "the provisions of this section respect the variation in the capacity of public bodies, their meeting facilities and technological expertise, while insuring public access."

[Samuel Gold, Executive Director, RiverCOG](#). Mr. Gold submitted written testimony in support of HB-6641. He noted the convenience of virtual meetings and the increased level of participation RiverCOG has experienced. He also cautioned that officials should take into consideration the varying levels of access to and comfort with technology, and that those

conducting hybrid meetings need training to ensure that all participants, in person and virtual, are included fully.

[Francis Pickering, Executive Director, WestCOG](#). Mr. Pickering submitted written testimony in support of HB-6641, stating that allowing these meeting options has done more than just save time and money and that allowing these changes to continue beyond the pandemic is good.

Support with changes:

[Mark Bernacki, Town Clerk of New Britain, Legislative Chair of the Connecticut Town Clerks Association](#). Mr. Bernacki submitted written testimony in support of HB-6641, noting past support similar bills and the cost savings it will provide to towns. In reference to the collection of fees collected by town clerks, CTCA requested a language change from stating they "shall" permit the payment of the fees through the town website to they "may," citing the complexities and costs of doing this at the municipal level as well as cybersecurity threats.

[Jim Perras, Home Builders & Remodelers Association of CT](#). Mr. Perras submitted written testimony in support of HB-6641 with changes. Given the technical and detailed nature of some land use applications, HBRA-CT supports amendments that suggest "meetings should be held in-person whenever possible, and deference should be given to the applicant's preference, and lastly there should be a prescribed method by which an applicant can petition to have a meeting in-person when circumstances permit."

[Mike Savino, President, Connecticut Council on Freedom of Information](#). Mr. Savino submitted written testimony in support of HB-6641, but suggested that the bill be amended to clarify what is and isn't allowed during virtual meetings, such as a stipulation that cameras be left on, citing an example of elected officials on local boards turning off their cameras during virtual meetings.

[Betsy Gara, Executive Director, Connecticut Council of Small Towns \(COST\)](#). Ms. Gara submitted written testimony in support of sections 1-4 of the bill. These provisions, which put into statute several of the Executive Orders relating to the pandemic, have allowed towns to move forward with essential town business while maintaining safety and have reduced the costs associated with publishing legal notices while not reducing public access to them.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None expressed.

**Reported by: Erica Byrne**

**Date: 4/20/2021**