

Government Administration and Elections Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6651

AN ACT RESPONDING TO ISSUES RELATED TO COVID-19 AND

Title: GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION.

Vote Date: 3/31/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/26/2021

File No.:

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Government Administration and Elections Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill would extend the duration of various provisions of executive orders concerning FOI requirements for meetings and appeals, regulatory requirements, municipal nominations and notaries. It would allow public agencies to hold meetings remotely using a conference call, videoconference or other technology in addition to meeting in person. It would require all public meetings that are held remotely to be recorded or transcribed and be made available to the public to increase transparency.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Freedom of Information Commission: The FOI commission testified that these bills would make public agencies more accessible and transparent. They explained that the "attendance" during remote meetings for some public agencies has been higher than in the past years and encouraged more citizen participation in the governmental process. They stated that this bill would also be a step toward increased transparency and access for the public by requiring recordings and transcripts to be made available to the public. The FOI commission suggested clarification to be made in lines 10-11, line 8, and lines 38-43 to make the intent clearer.

Judicial Branch, State of Connecticut: The Judicial Branch testified that requiring the transcription/recordings of Judicial Branch meetings will require updates to their technology and training for staff to execute the recordings. They request that the effective date for

Section 1 of the bill be extended to January 1, 2022, in order to have the necessary time to implement the new procedures.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Betsy Gara, Executive Director, Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST): Gara submitted testimony stating that allowing virtual holdings of meetings has been critical in reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19. They testified that because of the uncertainty of the pandemic, municipalities need to be able to continue the use of electronic technology to hold meetings and hearings to ensure that the people of the state are still able to participate in the governmental process without having to risk their health.

Kelly McConney Moore, interim senior policy counsel, American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT): Moore testified that with virtual meetings taking the place of in-person meetings it is critical to extend open government requirements to virtual meetings. They state that clearing stating so is critical to ensure that there is seamless access to records of government action. While Moore in support of this bill, they oppose section 7. “Allowing any department head to suspend any rule, guidance, order, or regulation that the head may deem necessary to reduce the spread of COVID-19 completely abandons the concepts of democratic consent of the governed and checks and balances...This section, as drafted, creates an environment rich for abuse with no recourse for harmed people.”

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Expressed

Reported by: Jenna Schwerdtle

Date: 03/31/2021