



Nicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH
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June 14, 2021

The Honorable Raymond A. Hull
Chairman
House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing
State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H 5891 A - AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- OPEN MEETINGS

Dear Chairman Hull:

I am writing in support of H 5891 A, legislation which would amend the Rhode Island "Open Meetings Act" to allow virtual meetings and participation by electronic communication until July 1, 2023. This legislation was introduced at the request of the Rhode Island Department of Business Regulation (DBR).

The outbreak of COVID-19 has caused unprecedented changes to our daily lives and stands to reshape the way that business is conducted for the foreseeable future. Governor Raimondo's Executive Orders have provided the State and its municipalities with the flexibility to conduct public business in a way that is protective of public health and safety during the pandemic while respecting the need to openly conduct government business. Even as physical distancing requirements are relaxed, the continued ability to hold open meetings remotely may provide an important option for those not yet able or willing to return to normal, in-person open meetings and public hearings. Rhode Island and its communities have adapted to conducting business remotely. Some of the elements of remote participation may become part of a "new normal" well after the COVID-19 pandemic subsides.

As Rhode Island continues to roll-out COVID-19 vaccination, it is important to ensure that both Rhode Island public officials and citizens who wish to participate in the open meetings' process have the opportunity to do so in a way that protects their health and safety. The enactment of H 5891 A will facilitate the participation of the public in open meetings, regardless of vaccination status, until 2023.

I encourage your favorable consideration of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nicole Alexander-Scott", followed by the word "for" written in a smaller, cursive script.

Nicole Alexander-Scott, MD, MPH
Director

CC: The Honorable Members of the House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing
The Honorable Alex D. Marszalkowski
Nicole McCarty, Esquire, Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House