

## Jill Cataldi

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**From:** Ethan Shorey <ethan@valleybreeze.com>  
**Sent:** Sunday, June 13, 2021 4:28 PM  
**To:** House State Government and Elections Committee  
**Subject:** Testimony opposing 21-H5891A

To whom it may concern,

I write on behalf of the Rhode Island Press Association to express our strong opposition to 21-H 5891A (open meetings), which is up for consideration on Monday afternoon that would allow city and town boards to hold remote meetings for the next two years, including the 2022 election cycle, long after the pandemic has subsided.

Here are some of the scenarios we see playing out if this bill passes:

- Every public body could meet remotely and never have to directly face members of the media or the public before, during, or after meetings.
- All or some members of a public body could meet in person for a meeting, but they could exclude the public from attending as long as the meeting was live-streamed.
- Members of a public body attending a meeting remotely could keep their camera off the entire time of the meeting, making it impossible for members of the public to know whether they were actually following the meeting or engaging in other activities. We have already seen this happen on numerous occasions.
- Entire public bodies could hold their meetings solely by phone and avoid anyone seeing them.
- A public body could take up to 30 business days before releasing to the public a recording of a live-streamed meeting, and could even charge for a copy of it.
- Notwithstanding state archive laws, a public body could destroy a recording of a public meeting after 200 days.
- A public body could withhold contemporaneous public access to critical documents being discussed and considered at a meeting – a budget, for example – so long as members of the public bodies received the documents less than 48 hours in advance.

For these and other reasons, and in defense of open and transparent government, we strongly oppose passage of this bill.

Thank you for this opportunity,

Ethan Shorey  
The R.I. Press Association  
Chief Editor, The Valley Breeze Newspapers

