

Testimony in support (with amendments) of H7676: Open meetings

Barbara Walsh, 62 Frederick Street, Warwick, RI 02888

Date of Hearing: April 30, 2026

To: Chair Shanley and the honorable Members of the House State Government and Elections Committee

I have read with great interest the above named bill and heartily support it but would ask that a revision be made. I currently serve on the Governor's Advisory Council for the Blind and Visually Impaired and have for 25+ years. I attend many zoom meetings but cannot use a computer to make the connection...I use the telephone. Thus, I am not on camera which is required in this bill as recognition of attendance for quorum and voting purposes - see page 5 lines 4-6. I am asking that these lines be removed as a verbal call would indicate the presence of someone using the telephone to participate. Attending advisory committee meetings via zoom would be a great convenience for disabled persons as transportation issues, weather conditions, and a myriad of disability impairments can often be significant impediments for personally attending scheduled meetings.

Page 5 lines 25-30 require that accommodations be made so that discriminatory practices do not occur. I would suggest that not allowing a person to be a voting member of such an advisory council is discriminatory if visual attendance is required.

If the modification requested is made, this bill would provide major contributions to the spirit of the Open Meetings Law truly being 'open' so folks with a wide range of disabilities could also contribute to government advisory boards. If this revision is not made you are in effect forcing me to leave this Advisory Committee (as I could not be considered part of a necessary quorum, or vote) and disallowing any similarly disabled person in the future from serving on a governmental advisory committee. I truly hope this unforeseen consequence of an otherwise terrific bill not occur.

Thank you, so much, for sponsoring this valuable bill. Much appreciated--