

§403-B. Remote participation in public proceedings

1. Remote participation. This section governs remote methods of participation in public proceedings of certain public bodies. For the purposes of this section, "remote methods" means telephonic or video technology allowing simultaneous reception of information and may include other means when such means are necessary to provide reasonable accommodation to a person with a disability. Public proceedings may not be conducted by text-only means such as e-mail, text messages or chat functions.

[PL 2021, c. 290, §1 (NEW).]

2. Requirements. A public body subject to this subchapter may allow members of the body and the public to participate in a public proceeding using remote methods only under the following conditions:

A. After notice and hearing the body has adopted a written policy governing the conditions upon which members of the body and the public may participate in a public proceeding of that body by remote methods.

(1) If a public body has not adopted a policy authorizing remote methods of participation under this section and if the chair of the body determines that an emergency or urgent issue exists that prevents the public body from meeting in person to adopt a policy, the chair may call a meeting of the body in which the members may participate by remote methods. Notice of the meeting must include information about how the public can participate in the meeting and the proposed policy or instructions on how to obtain a copy of the proposed policy in advance of the meeting. Once the meeting is convened, the members shall vote on whether to support the chair's determination that an emergency or urgent issue exists that prevents the public body from meeting in person.

(2) If 2/3 of the members vote in support of the chair's determination under subparagraph (1), after an opportunity for hearing, the members may vote on whether to adopt a policy authorizing remote methods of participation in public proceedings of the body under this section; [PL 2021, c. 611, §1 (AMD).]

B. [PL 2021, c. 666, §1 (RP).]

C. The policy adopted pursuant to paragraph A must provide members of the public a meaningful opportunity to attend by remote methods when members of the body participate by remote methods, and reasonable accommodations may be provided when necessary to provide access to individuals with disabilities; [PL 2021, c. 290, §1 (NEW).]

D. If the body allows or is required to provide an opportunity for public input during the proceeding, an effective means of communication between the members of the body and the public must be provided; [PL 2021, c. 290, §1 (NEW).]

E. Notice of the proceeding must be provided in accordance with section 406. When the public may attend by remote methods pursuant to paragraphs C and D, the notice must include the means by which members of the public may access the proceeding using remote methods. The notice must also identify a location for members of the public to attend in person. The body may limit public attendance at a proceeding solely to remote methods if there is an emergency or urgent situation that requires the body to meet only by remote methods; [PL 2021, c. 666, §2 (AMD).]

F. A member of the body who participates in a public proceeding by remote methods is present for purposes of a quorum and voting; [PL 2021, c. 290, §1 (NEW).]

G. All votes taken during a public proceeding using remote methods must be taken by roll call vote that can be seen and heard if using video technology, and heard if using only audio technology, by the other members of the public body and the public; [PL 2023, c. 185, §1 (AMD).]

H. The public body must make all documents and other materials considered by the public body available, electronically or otherwise, to the public who attend by remote methods to the same extent customarily available to members of the public who attend the proceedings of the public body in person, as long as additional costs are not incurred by the public body. The public body must make the proposed policy regarding remote participation available in advance of the meeting if meeting remotely under paragraph A, subparagraphs (1) and (2); and [PL 2023, c. 185, §2 (AMD).]

I. When the public may attend a public proceeding by remote methods, the public body must allow members of the public to record the proceeding remotely using the same electronic platform that is used to conduct the proceeding remotely as long as the electronic platform allows participants other than the host to record the proceeding remotely, additional costs are not incurred by the public body and the recording of the proceeding does not interfere with the orderly conduct of the proceeding. [PL 2023, c. 185, §3 (NEW).]

[PL 2023, c. 158, §1 (AMD); PL 2023, c. 185, §§1-3 (AMD).]

2-A. Blanket remote participation policies; exceptions. The applicability of a policy adopted by a public body under subsection 2 to other public bodies within the jurisdiction of the public body is governed by this subsection.

A. Except as provided in paragraphs B and C, a remote participation policy adopted by a public body pursuant to subsection 2 applies to a board, committee or subcommittee that is within the jurisdiction of the public body, unless the board, committee or subcommittee adopts its own policy under subsection 2. [PL 2023, c. 158, §2 (NEW).]

B. A remote participation policy adopted pursuant to subsection 2 by the county commissioners of the county, the municipal officers of a municipality or the officers of any regional or other political subdivision applies to all public bodies subject to this subchapter that are within the jurisdiction of the county, municipality or regional or other political subdivision, respectively, unless the county commissioners, municipal officers or other officers of the regional or other political subdivision specifically authorize a public body under their jurisdiction to adopt its own remote participation policy. [PL 2023, c. 158, §2 (NEW).]

C. Nothing in this subsection limits the right of a school board to choose to adopt or to choose not to adopt a remote participation policy under subsection 2. [PL 2023, c. 158, §2 (NEW).]

[PL 2023, c. 158, §2 (NEW).]

3. Remote participation not permitted. This section does not authorize town meetings held pursuant to Title 30-A, section 2524 or regional school unit budget meetings held pursuant to Title 20-A, section 1482-A to be conducted using remote methods.

[PL 2021, c. 290, §1 (NEW).]

4. Application. This section does not apply to:

A. The Legislature; or [PL 2021, c. 290, §1 (NEW).]

B. A public body to which specific statutory provisions for remote participation apply. [PL 2021, c. 290, §1 (NEW).]

[PL 2021, c. 290, §1 (NEW).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 2021, c. 290, §1 (NEW). PL 2021, c. 611, §§1, 2 (AMD). PL 2021, c. 666, §§1-3 (AMD). PL 2023, c. 158, §§1, 2 (AMD). PL 2023, c. 185, §§1-3 (AMD).

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