

George Blakeslee  
Guildhall Town Clerk and Treasurer

Thank you for the opportunity to give feedback on S.55.

First let me say that I am fundamentally in favor of creating greater access to public meetings through electronic means, however a law that mandates it would face significant implementation hurdles here in the Northeast Kingdom at the present time.

As the Town Clerk in Guildhall, a small town of 262 residents, in very rural Northeast Kingdom, I can tell you that S.55, if passed, would place a very difficult burden on us. I have four concerns:

**insufficient infrastructure** - less than half our residents have even DSL level internet (10G/0.5G), and fewer have cell phone service;

**cost** - we would need a portable system to roll out when needed once per month, and internet service, an additional computer, large monitor, and hybrid meeting interface (OWL). We are talking \$5000 start up with continuing IT service costs – a lot of expense for a small town that would use it for a couple of hours once a month;

for subscribers to the promised fiber internet, basic 50G/50G service will be \$80/month. The residents most likely to find a physical meeting challenging are often on fixed incomes, for which this may well be infeasible.

**Host** - we would need a second person to man and operate the system during meetings. I have participated in both another town system and our church. The other town needed a full time person to make sure online connections stayed up and running and to alert the Board that someone wished to speak. Our church does not have a full time attendant, and the system fails at least 20% of our weekly services.

**Cyber security** - our meetings are held in a public space that can not be closed off when not in use. Any internet access that we install could not be monitored 24/7 to prevent any bad actors that might come into the building from tapping in and hacking our town systems;

Taken together, a requirement to hold electronic or hybrid meetings would be an unreasonable expectation at the present time.

If it were an option for towns that find it doable, then that would be in the spirit of Vermont's legacy of local control.

Please amend S.55, as currently proposed.