

Amended Testimony for Hybrid Meetings:

Isle La Motte is very remote and a small community, about 500 year-round residents. We have been successfully hybrid for several years now. We (before I was on the board) originally were just using a laptop facing the selectboard, but the audio was extremely poor, so I requested an improvement to the quality of the sound, and asked for closed captioning to be enabled (I am hearing impaired). There was some initial resistance (I ultimately had to contact the Secretary of State's office), but the town obtained a "blue orb" microphone, and the sound was significantly better. We currently use the microphone and a laptop for our meetings, and have a protocol where all speakers come to the microphone to speak. We also enable the closed captioning automatically on the meetings, to make sure folks don't need to ask to have the captioning available.

One of the things that makes hybrid meetings successful for our community is that people truly have access, and are able to attend a meeting, no matter their situation—whether they are just coming home from work, or making dinner, or have a disability or medical condition that makes attending a physical meeting difficult. Having a hybrid system allows us to invite partners to attend meetings more easily. We are very remote, and people find it difficult to come to meetings, so having this option always available allows us to utilize the resources our partners offer while reducing the impact on our partners' resources and time.

Additionally, all of our three Selectboard members work full time, which means that there is an occasional time when we need to have at least one of us attending remotely, if something pressing comes up. This allows us to more effectively balance work and public service.

We are currently looking at getting an OWL system, to improve the quality of our remote meetings. This will likely cost about \$2,000.

Our general attendance at meetings is about 5 people, which is significantly better than in-person attendance.

I, personally, am very strongly in support of offering hybrid meetings. I think it adds significant value to the participatory process, gives people more opportunities and ways to engage, allows our partners to be able to attend meetings more easily, and provides accessibility in all of the meanings of that word.

Thank you for asking me to attend. I apologize for the audio issues for my testimony.

I would like to add an amendment to my testimony—I strongly support communities being able to hold hybrid public meetings. What I am very concerned about is making it mandatory.

It's not the tech that is the issue. It's the expertise that is. We have a very small staff here--a town clerk, an assistant town clerk, and a very part-time board clerk. Our board clerk is the only person who is in the office regularly who has the required skills with this technology. She **cannot** help all of the boards in the town that would have a requirement to hold a hybrid meeting. The vast majority of the officers in our town are over 70, and are inexperienced with this technology. We do not have the staff to support hybrid meetings for many of our boards. My board is lucky enough to have a board clerk who can help get these meetings set up for us.

I love having hybrid meetings. I love how accessible they are. I love that they allow for a lot more flexibility. But in small towns like mine where many of the officers are unfamiliar with this kind of technology, we just don't have the staffing to support their meetings with tech support. Currently, it's largely only the Selectboard and some of our advisory committees that regularly use Zoom for meetings.

Additionally, we've had, more than once, "zoom bombings" occur at our meetings, where people came to the meeting shouted and wrote racist slurs, posted pornography and more. It was extremely disruptive, traumatic and provides a real challenge for meeting the requirements of the posting requirements for meetings, as we absolutely can't have those recordings available for public use – for many reasons. We were able to address the zoom bombings with our collective expertise, but if this were to happen to our other boards, for whom this technology is entirely foreign—I'm not sure what the end result would be. Would we be allowed to edit them? How do we handle the requirement of posting the recording in this bill when we have to close the hybrid aspect of the meeting early because of the zoom bombings?

I want to continue to have hybrid meetings be allowed, but I think making them mandatory is untenable for towns like mine, where most of our boards do not the skills, comfort, or experience in running a hybrid meeting, where there's a risk that a zoom bombing might occur (and we've done our best to prevent them, but they still happen), and we do not have the capacity to provide tech support to that level.

Thank you.