

**Testimony for the Senate Government Operations Committee
on H.42 An act relating to temporary alternative procedures for annual municipal meetings
and electronic meetings of public bodies**

Thank you Chair Hardy and Members of the Committee for accepting this testimony.

I, currently, serve as Chair of the Norwich School Board and as a member of the Dresden (NH) and SAU70 Boards (we are an interstate school district). This testimony is based upon my own experience and not the result of polling the membership of the full Norwich School Board.

From the perspective of my experience over the past three years, a continuation of some, though not all, temporary authorities granted by the General Assembly from 2020-2022 would seem warranted. Continuation of some temporary authorities would make the conduct of good board governance easier for school administrators and board members, while providing access and significant opportunities for engagement to members of the public.

In Norwich, I believe we benefited from a relatively quick return to hybrid regular meetings of the school board (we have held regular meetings of the board, with a quorum of in-person members, since August 2021). Returning to an in-person quorum of the board, while welcoming members of the public to a designated physical location, provided for opportunities to communicate, and debate, that can be lost in the somewhat impersonal electronic-only medium; one that is immensely better than before the pandemic, but which still can be challenged by technical difficulties, whether software, or user, inflicted. This hybrid option has provided for significant engagement with the public via Zoom and has been welcomed by many in our community who found it difficult to come to the physical location, whether due to family obligations, travel-related weather challenges, or other reasons. In my opinion, nuances of interactions with fellow board members and those in the public makes for a healthier exchange and enables the development of better relationships among board members. As such, I would recommend a requirement to return to in-person meetings of a quorum of boards for regular and annual meetings.

My opinion on committee meetings of boards and advertising of all meetings, differs. I advocate for the extension of the temporary authorities to continue to allow for committees of boards to meet entirely virtually (with the public, obviously, being able to do so as well). While I think it important to have the opportunity for in-person engagement regularly with full members of the board at their regular meetings, much of the work leading to those meetings, as you know, takes place in between, and multiple times, for committee work. Scheduling for the twice, or thrice, monthly regular meetings in the evening hours should be expected of boards, but finding the time to travel to physical locations, usually during workday hours to accommodate the schedules of school and town staff members, is challenging with a quorum of in-person membership that often have full-time jobs. As for advertising for all meetings, regular included, requirements for physical postings seems an antiquated and an unnecessary burden on school and town staff that have to take time to travel to physical locations where few pay attention to the public postings, when town listservs, school and town websites, and local news media have significant reach.

Thank you for your consideration and thank you for your service.