

Greetings, Senators,

Thank you all for your thoughtful and challenging work in our Senate.

I am writing as Selectboard chair in the small rural town of Wheelock in Caledonia County. This proposed hybrid meeting requirement would mean that our town will need a designated physical location equipped with technology that will allow for participation of both in-person and virtual attendees.

This is essentially an unfunded mandate that I fear would adversely and unfairly impact our smallest towns. Where are the funds for the technology at the town meeting space?

Perhaps more importantly, we have many citizens who do not have broadband, computers, or the skills to use them, or even a smart phone with service from their home, to enable them to log in and participate effectively in a remote meeting. Many are our older citizens, who care deeply about and like to participate in town affairs.

That goes for many of our volunteers who serve in public office, who run our meetings, along with our part time treasurer and clerk. As selectboard chair, I cannot single-handedly run a meeting, operate a tape recorder, manage the Zoom, and take minutes, which I do if we do not have a minutes clerk, which is a difficult position to fill. My selectboard colleagues do not have the skills to help except for the tape recorder. Although we do have some technology, namely an OWL and a stand and large monitor for remote attendees, the sound quality is terrible, making the Zoom recordings virtually useless. Our personnel simply do not have the skills needed for effective hybrid and all-remote meetings.

Please leave the decision about what type of meeting, remote or in person, or hybrid, up to the local community.

Thank you for your consideration,
Ann Lawless