

Hi, I am writing in opposition of the proposed requirement of S.55 that would force all selectboards to hold hybrid meetings. My name is Riley Carlson, and I currently serve on the Selectboard in Plainfield. We normally conduct hybrid meetings, although we have occasionally had remote-only meetings.

Please let municipalities decide what method works best for us. Our Selectboard does not have staff available to help run the meetings, and we cannot rely on always having a Selectboard member willing/able to manage a remote meeting. It is already difficult enough to find anyone willing to serve on the Selectboard without the State legislature adding more requirements for how we must conduct our business. Managing a Zoom meeting in addition to being on the Selectboard adds stress/distraction and makes for a worse discussion overall. The end result of this increased regulation will only be more time spent troubleshooting technical difficulties and discussing/worrying whether we are complying with the ever-changing regulations and less time actually having productive discussions/making tangible decisions.

Small municipal governments are already hurting and over-worked. Adding additional requirements will only make it worse. Even if grant money was available to defray costs, the neediest municipalities are not in good position to dedicate the required administrative time to apply for the grant/organize and set up and train Selectboard members on how to use this technology.

Additionally, we have had problems with 'Zoom bombers' in the past, which have greatly disrupted our hybrid meetings. If hybrid meetings are required then it would be easy for a bad actor to bring the business of a public body to a standstill. We also do not have the staff available to edit out offensive language/images from disrupted meetings, so cannot post the recordings to our Youtube account or else our account may get banned and then all our recordings would be unavailable.

Further, there have been several times when we have forgotten to hit 'record', so have had no electronic copy of our hybrid meeting. This often happens because the responsibility for doing everything falls on the Selectboard members and it is easy to forget if you are chatting with people in-person when setting up/before the meeting begins. It would be a huge burden if decisions made at such a meeting were rendered invalid.

We would appreciate having the option to have meetings 'remote only', as that has been useful when we've had multiple members out of town or in times of inclement weather, but requiring hybrid meetings will not improve things in small municipalities.

Thanks

Riley Carlson
Plainfield Selectboard