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To Madam Chair Copeland Hanzas and members of the Government Operations Committee,

The Vermont Press Association supports the amendments made to S.354 which spells out that all information required for the general public, including media members, to access public meetings will be provided with the agenda, regardless of what format that access takes.

We do appreciate that the time for meeting minutes has been restored to 5 calendar days. This is important in these days when the public is calling upon government to do more, including some calling for defunding police. With budget meetings starting, and often being held at least once a week, and sometimes more often, the latest information must be available. (We wish your committee could restore the 5-day period to the temporary emergency order and not wait for the order to expire. Government transparency is essential. The 5-day period is easy to achieve if the board and secretary make a commitment to inform taxpayers about the meetings.

On another, very critical issue, the Vermont Press Association remains concerned about Legislative committees continuing to conduct hearings when the ability to live stream is disrupted. A joint health care session with critical information was unavailable last week to the general public, we have been told by those trying to get access. The Senate Health and Welfare then met separately and approved an amendment to a bill that was moving. When this happens, all work needs to stop until the live stream can be established. It is difficult enough in this new format to participate in hearings. The public cannot be shut out of critical decision-making sessions due to digital problems. The work must stop until the issue is solved.

Lisa Loomis, President, Vermont Press Association