

Vermont Access Network

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Testimony to [Legislative Advisory Committee on the Statehouse](#)

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The [Legislative Advisory Committee on the Statehouse](#) has undertaken the important business of reinventing democracy for the State at a critical time. In light of the ongoing COVID19 public health emergency, the Legislature is required to manage its business and protect the public health. **The Committee is to make recommendations to Legislative Committees to allocate funds and reorganize physical and public access in the year ahead.**

At the Committee's 7/13/21 meeting, Kevin Moore, Director of Information Technology, Vermont Office of Legislative Information Technology, outlined the **challenges of meeting the remote meeting needs during 2020-21.**

- Moore detailed the limitations faced by the Legislature with a small staff of 6 -7 IT staff asked to support (two way video) for 2 dozen meetings a day -- simultaneous Committee and Chamber meetings.
- Moore's team are experienced IT professionals but lack audio/visual/ TV production skills. Moore cited the physical constraints of the building and possibility of sites outside of the Statehouse.
- Moore recommended that the Legislature reopen the RFP for Statehouse technical improvements that was awarded in 2019.
- Looking ahead, Moore thinks it will take 1-2 years to come up with the 3-5 year plan for an interactive Statehouse. Moore likes live.congress.gov as a prototype TV service for Vermont. He is often quick to point out that streaming content (one-way) is different from webcasting (two way).

On 8/3/21, based on Moore's testimony, the Committee approved \$500,000 to immediately conduct requested digital upgrades. That is, to address legacy issues like the House microphone system and the current pressing need to "wire the

state house” with cameras in each room, hooked to presentation equipment, using a Zoom and YouTube platform. The time frame is expected to be 12-16 weeks. The workflows and process questions were not detailed, but it is clear that there are many, and the time frame is ambitious.

VAN offers the state important TV/ public access know-how to assist the Legislature at this important time.

The Vermont Legislature recognizes Vermont Access Network and its members (25 community media centers across the state) as an “essential” public service. During the pandemic, VAN members keep communities in all corners of Vermont connected to the Governor’s Press Conferences, Legislative Meetings, and countless local community events and live/ interactive and now hybrid public meetings. Vermont’s community media centers have a deep knowledge in public access TV production, employing more than 70 people in the field. VAN Members have been building statewide legislative TV capacity since 1987. Vermont’s 37 years of community video archives is attracting the interest of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Science Foundation. VAN members produce more than 18,000 hours of community programs each year and collectively manage a statewide exchange relevant programming each year. Most recently, in 2020, VAN launched Vermont Community Television, online and on cable TV.

Recommendations for both Short and Medium Term Legislative Public Meeting Coverage:

- **Utilize Vermont TV Capacity** - Utilize the practical expertise of Vermont Access Network’s 25 community media centers as the Legislature plans its tv and public access to the Statehouse.
- **Engage Media Makers** - Include VAN and members of the Vermont media/ press corps that utilize the statehouse in planning process.
- **Revisit the Study** the Legislature funded in 2019 to upgrade the Chambers and Committee rooms in 2019 reliable, up-to-date equipment and infrastructure that supports communications within the State House while opening the doors to the press and people across Vermont. Kevin Moore recommends to expand the scope of the plan. *Also see VAN and Press Corps 4/17/19 Testimony to Senate Institutions, attached*

- **Be sure to plan for: adequate technical labor and equipment** to capture, store and switch government access TV.
- **Attend to Statewide Network Implications:** When looking ahead, consider the relationship between the Legislature's plans for meeting coverage connect with statewide public meeting requirements. This could reopen the discussion on Vermont Interactive TV V 2.0. VAN has submitted several pieces of testimony to the Legislature on statewide connectivity. Available upon request.
- **Consider ease of use (access) to Legislative content.** Today, there is a simple link between committee agendas and the current YouTube channel. **Several years of good development has resulted in platforms that provide robust access to legislative content across the country. Please see:** <https://www.open.media/>

In closing, leadership is important. VAN has been involved in the discussion of Statehouse coverage for nearly four decades. Our members have expertise and experience that can be joined with the Legislature, Secretary of State, VAN, members of the Press, lobbyists, key activists so we can lead together to advance open government, public access and democracy.

We hope that you will provide VAN with an opportunity to speak directly with the committees of jurisdiction on these important issues.

Thank you for your consideration.