



**Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on State Administration
And Regulatory Oversight in support of
H.3040/S.2024 An Act to modernize participation in public meetings
By Nancy Brumback, LWVMA Legislative Specialist
July 26, 2023**

Since early 2020, the legislature has suspended provisions of the Open Meeting Law to enable public bodies to carry out their responsibilities remotely rather than in person, with virtual access and participation by members of the public. As good government practices have evolved, many public bodies have combined the best of old and new practices: enabling members of the public to attend meetings in person or remotely. These temporary rules have now been extended to March 31, 2025. With that extension, boards and committees in cities and towns continue to operate under emergency pandemic regulations allowing but not requiring remote-only meetings. There is confusion about what is required and when. This bill needs to be enacted quickly to let municipalities and citizens know what to expect now and in the future. It also needs to be enacted to assure that remote access to meetings will continue.

This legislation will:

- Phase in hybrid meetings, prioritizing state agencies and elected municipal bodies such as city councils, select boards and school committees.
- Require universal compliance by 2030.
- In the meantime, allow municipalities to seek economic hardship waivers for non-elected bodies unable to provide hybrid meetings. The default provision for municipal bodies unable to provide hybrid meetings is remote meetings, with in-person-only as a last resort.
- Create a Municipal Hybrid Meeting Trust Fund to administer a grant program to help municipalities finance their modernization efforts.

Remote and hybrid meetings have significantly increased public interest and public participation in local government. As one school committee member said, “Our meetings used to be just the five of us and the cable TV camera.” These meeting formats opened doors to our democratic process by removing barriers that predated the pandemic.

- Remote access removes long-standing barriers to participation for residents with disabilities, seniors, people with limited access to transportation, and people with work and family obligations that prevent them from getting to and spending hours at municipal buildings.
- Access to public meetings should never again hinge on a person’s physical mobility, or their ability to afford a car, get time off work, or find a care provider.
- At the same time, it is important for people to be able to gather in person to make community decisions, therefore the bill proposes hybrid rather than remote-only meetings.

The very first position statement in the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts' principles' document is to: Promote an open governmental system that is representative, accountable and responsive; ... *and that assures opportunities for citizen participation in government decision-making...*¹ This bill will indeed assure opportunities for citizen participation, particularly in their local government decision-making.

And at a time when more and more towns are losing their community newspapers, direct and ready access to local government meetings provides a way for citizens to state their opinions, to keep informed, and to get their information directly from the meetings rather than filtered through various social media sites. Just consider how important it was for parents to have input and to hear the arguments when school committees were debating masking policies and how schools would reopen as the pandemic eased.

Since this bill so immediately affects local governments, a number of our 44 local Leagues are offering their own support in statements that are attached to this testimony. Those statements are from the Leagues in Amherst, Arlington, Bedford, Brookline, Cape Cod area, Falmouth, Framingham, Franklin County, Marblehead, Needham, Newton, Northampton area, Sharon-Stoughton, Sudbury, Wellesley, Westford and Winchester. On behalf of the remaining Leagues, LWVMA urges your swift attention to reporting this bill favorably and moving it to the floor.

Thank you for your consideration.

¹ [Preface \(lwmma.org\)](http://lwmma.org) p.5



The League of Women Voters of Amherst supports H.3040/S.2024, An Act to modernize participation in public meetings, which would require that meetings covered by the open meeting law be held in a hybrid format, both in-person and with the option to observe and participate remotely.

We understand that it may take time to implement this requirement for all public meetings, and the bill sets a deadline for compliance of 2030. The bill allows for hardship waivers until that deadline, as towns adapt. It also would establish a trust fund to provide grants to help municipalities upgrade their technology.

The option to participate in meetings remotely was one of the silver linings of the pandemic, and remote participation greatly increased citizen awareness of their local governments. We think in-person meetings are valuable, but that remote capability is also necessary. Remote access allows many people to participate in their government who could not otherwise do so, including seniors, people with certain disabilities, and parents of young children who want to know what the school committee is doing.

This bill would continue the increase in participation in local government. It enhances democracy.

The League of Women Voters of Amherst endorses H.3040/S.2024, and urges the legislature to act quickly to make hybrid public meetings the norm.

Thank you,

Jessica Ryan, LWVA Voter Services Chair on behalf of the Steering Committee of the League of Women Voters of Amherst

League of Women Voters of Arlington Supports Hybrid Public Meetings

The League of Women Voters of Arlington supports H.3040/S.2024, An Act to modernize participation in public meetings, which would require that meetings covered by the open meeting law be held in a hybrid format, both in-person and with the option to observe and participate remotely.

We understand that it may take time to implement this requirement for all public meetings, and the bill sets a deadline for compliance of 2030. The bill allows for hardship waivers until that deadline, as towns adapt. It also would establish a trust fund to provide grants to help municipalities upgrade their technology.

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This bill would continue the increase in participation in local government. It enhances democracy.

The League of Women Voters of Arlington endorses H.3040/S.2024 and urges the legislature to act quickly to make hybrid public meetings the norm.

Carolyn Parsons

LWVA Co-President



League of Women Voters of Bedford Supports Hybrid Public Meetings

The League of Women Voters of Bedford supports H.3040/S.2024, An Act to modernize participation in public meetings, which would require that meetings covered by the open meeting law be held in a hybrid format, both in-person and with the option to observe and participate remotely.

We understand that it may take time to implement this requirement for all public meetings, and the bill sets a deadline for compliance of 2030. The bill allows for hardship waivers until that deadline, as towns adapt. It also would establish a trust fund to provide grants to help municipalities upgrade their technology.

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This bill would continue the increase in participation in local government. It enhances democracy.

The League of Women Voters of Bedford endorses H.3040/S.2024, and urges the legislature to act quickly to make hybrid public meetings the norm.

Lora Goldenberg, President

Jean Hammond, Treasurer



June 28, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Brookline (LWVB) in support of H.3040/S.2024, An Act to modernize participation in public meetings, which would require that meetings covered by the open meeting law be held in a hybrid format, both in-person and with the option to observe and participate remotely.

We understand that it may take time to implement this requirement for all public meetings, and the bill sets a deadline for compliance of 2030. The bill allows for hardship waivers until that deadline, as towns adapt. It also would establish a trust fund to provide grants to help municipalities upgrade their technology.

The option to participate in meetings remotely was one of the silver linings of the pandemic, and remote participation greatly increased citizen awareness of their local governments. We think in-person meetings are valuable, but that remote capability is also necessary. Remote access allows many people to participate in their government who could not otherwise do so, including seniors, people with certain disabilities, and parents of young children who want to know what the school committee is doing.

This bill would continue the increase in participation in local government. It enhances democracy.

League of Women Voters of Brookline endorses H.3040/S.2024, and urges the legislature to act quickly to make hybrid public meetings the norm.

Sincerely,

Betsy DeWitt, President

League of Women Voters of Brookline

betsy@betsydewitt.com

League of Women Voters of Cape Cod Area Supports Hybrid Public Meetings

The League of Women Voters of the Cape Cod Area supports H.3040/S.2024, An Act to modernize participation in public meetings, which would require that meetings covered by the open meeting law be held in a hybrid format, both in-person and with the option to observe and participate remotely.

Because it will take time to implement this requirement for all public meetings, the bill sets a 2030 deadline for compliance; however, given the fact that many towns already began this process during Covid, the LWVCCA encourages the legislature to act quickly to enable this option to take place. The bill allows for hardship waivers until that deadline, while towns adapt. It also establishes a trust fund to provide grants to help municipalities upgrade their technology.

The option to participate remotely in meetings was one of the silver linings of the pandemic. Remote participation greatly increased citizen participation in local governments, especially among people who could not otherwise do so, such as seniors, people with certain disabilities, and those with demanding work schedules or childcare obligations.

In short, this bill enhances democracy. The League of Women Voters of the Cape Cod Area—which includes 14 towns of Barnstable County—endorses H.3040/S.2024, and urges the legislature to act quickly to make hybrid public meetings the norm.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jeanne Morrison & Mary Utt – Co-Presidents
LWVCCA



The League of Women Voters of Falmouth Supports Hybrid Public Meetings

We at the League of Women Voters of Falmouth have a robust Observer Corps program, where our members observe meetings of Falmouth public bodies and then report back to the general public and to appropriate committee chairs and officials. We were concerned about how public meetings would be handled post-pandemic. Thus, we were pleased and relieved to learn of H.3040/S.2024, which would mandate hybrid public meetings to be phased in over several years.

We write now to add our voices to other Massachusetts Leagues and to encourage passage of H.3040/S.2024 as expeditiously as possible. The bill provides an excellent balance between the need for people to meet together in person alongside a need to be able to participate remotely. Now that we have had the opportunity to meet remotely due to the pandemic, returning to the practice of requiring all meetings to be in-person no longer appears satisfactory. Although this bill encourages in-person meetings of committee members, it provides certain opportunities for committee members to participate and vote remotely. As for the general public, this bill allows members of the public to attend either remotely or in person. In sum, the proposed legislative solution offers the best of both worlds.

The bill wisely phases in the new meeting system and provides possible financing for the change. It has been suggested that the bill should be further strengthened by mandating consequences if a community becomes recalcitrant and such an amendment might be considered. However, we hope the statutory provision for financial assistance would be sufficient to overcome any such unwillingness. We in Massachusetts would be wise to begin this changeover process as soon as possible so that by 2030 we will make a hybrid meeting system a reality across the Commonwealth.

The membership of the League of Women Voters of Falmouth consists primarily of Falmouth residents but also includes some members from the adjoining towns of Bourne and Mashpee. Acting through our leadership, we endorse H.3040/S.2024, and we urge the legislature to act quickly to make hybrid public meetings the norm.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet Lauer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Janet Lauer
First Vice President
League of Women Voters of Falmouth



League of Women Voters of Framingham Supports Hybrid Public Meetings

The League of Women Voters of Framingham supports H.3040/S.2024, An Act to modernize participation in public meetings, which would require that meetings covered by the open meeting law be held in a hybrid format, both in-person and with the option to observe and participate remotely.

We understand that it may take time to implement this requirement for all public meetings, and the bill sets a deadline for compliance of 2030. The bill allows for hardship waivers until that deadline, as towns adapt. It also would establish a trust fund to provide grants to help municipalities upgrade their technology. The option to participate in meetings remotely was one of the silver linings of the pandemic, and remote participation greatly increased citizen awareness of their local governments. We think in-person meetings are valuable, but that remote capability is also necessary. Remote access allows many people to participate in their government who could not otherwise do so, including seniors, people with certain disabilities, and parents of young children who want to know what the school committee is doing.

This bill would continue the increase in participation in local government. It enhances democracy.

The League of Women Voters of Framingham endorses H.3040/S.2024, and urges the legislature to act quickly to make hybrid public meetings the norm.

Suze Craighead
President

Cynthia MacLean
Vice President

Jake Binnall
Treasurer & Voter Services

Natasha Rausch
Secretary

Jackie Judd
Membership



League of Women Voters of Franklin County Supports Hybrid Public Meetings

The League of Women Voters of Franklin County supports H.3040/S.2024, An Act to modernize participation in public meetings, which would require that meetings covered by the open meeting law be held in a hybrid format, both in-person and with the option to observe and participate remotely.

We understand that it may take time to implement this requirement for all public meetings, and the bill sets a deadline for compliance of 2030. The bill allows for hardship waivers until that deadline, as towns adapt. It also would establish a trust fund to provide grants to help municipalities upgrade their technology.

The option to participate in meetings remotely was one of the silver linings of the pandemic, and remote participation greatly increased citizen awareness of their local governments. We think in-person meetings are valuable, but that remote capability is also necessary. Remote access allows many people to participate in their government who could not otherwise do so, including seniors, people with certain disabilities, and parents of young children who want to know what the school committee is doing.

This bill would continue the increase in participation in local government. It enhances democracy.

The League of Women Voters of Franklin County endorses H.3040/S.2024, and urges the legislature to act quickly to make hybrid public meetings the norm.

Marie Gauthier, President

Nicole Moore, Vice President

Marge Michalski, Treasurer

Laura Luker, Secretary

Jean Cherdack, Director



League of Women Voters of Marblehead Supports Hybrid Public Meetings

The League of Women Voters of Marblehead supports H.3040/S.2024, An Act to modernize participation in public meetings, which would require that meetings covered by the open meeting law be held in a hybrid format, both in-person and with the option to observe and participate remotely.

We understand that it may take time to implement this requirement for all public meetings, and the bill sets a deadline for compliance of 2030. The bill allows for hardship waivers until that deadline, as towns adapt. It also would establish a trust fund to provide grants to help municipalities upgrade their technology.

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This bill would continue the increase in participation in local government. It enhances democracy.

The League of Women Voters of Marblehead endorses H.3040/S.2024, and urges the legislature to act quickly to make hybrid public meetings the norm.

Kathleen E. Leonardson

League of Women Voters of Marblehead Steering Committee



League of Women Voters of Needham Supports Hybrid Public Meetings

The League of Women Voters of Needham supports H.3040/S.2024, An Act to modernize participation in public meetings, which would require that meetings covered by the open meeting law be held in a hybrid format, both in-person and with the option to observe and participate remotely.

We understand that it may take time to implement this requirement for all public meetings, and the bill sets a deadline for compliance of 2030. The bill allows for hardship waivers until that deadline, as towns adapt. It also would establish a trust fund to provide grants to help municipalities upgrade their technology.

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This bill would continue the increase in participation in local government. It enhances democracy.

The League of Women Voters of Needham endorses H.3040/S.2024 and urges the legislature to act quickly to make hybrid public meetings the norm.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cauter" or similar, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Carol L. Patey, President
League of Women Voters of Needham



PO Box 610207
Newton, MA 02461
www.lwvnewton.org
Email: info@lwvnewton.org

April 10, 2023

Dear State Legislators,

The League of Women Voters of Newton supports H.3040/S.2024, An Act to modernize participation in public meetings, which would require that meetings covered by the open meeting law be held in a hybrid format, both in-person and with the option to observe and participate remotely.

We understand that it may take time to implement this requirement for all public meetings, and the bill sets a deadline for compliance of 2030. The bill allows for hardship waivers until that deadline, as towns adapt. It also would establish a trust fund to provide grants to help municipalities upgrade their technology.

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This bill would continue the increase in participation in local government. It enhances democracy. Therefore, the League of Women Voters of Newton endorses H.3040/S.2024, and urges the legislature to act quickly to make hybrid public meetings the norm.

Sincerely,

Marcia Johnson

Marcia Johnson

President, League of Women Voters, Newton



League of Women Voters of Northampton Area Supports Hybrid Public Meetings

The Northampton Area League of Women Voters supports H.3040/S.2024, An Act to modernize participation in public meetings, which would require that meetings covered by the open meeting law be held in a hybrid format, both in-person and with the option to observe and participate remotely.

We understand that it may take time to implement this requirement for all public meetings, and the bill sets a deadline for compliance of 2030. The bill allows for hardship waivers until that deadline, as towns adapt. It also would establish a trust fund to provide grants to help municipalities upgrade their technology.

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This bill would continue the increase in participation in local government. It enhances democracy.

The Northampton Area League of Women Voters, which includes the towns of Northampton, Williamsburg, Easthampton, Southampton, Holyoke, Springfield, Westhampton, Hatfield, Florence, and Chicopee, endorses H.3040/S.2024, and urges the legislature to act quickly to make hybrid public meetings the norm.

Nancy Polan

nancypolan@gmail.com

Legislative Director

Northampton Area League of Women Voters



League of Women Voters of Sharon-Stoughton Supports Hybrid Public Meetings

The League of Women Voters of Sharon-Stoughton supports H.3040/S.2024, An Act to modernize participation in public meetings, which would require that meetings covered by the open meeting law be held in a hybrid format, both in-person and with the option to observe and participate remotely.

We understand that it may take time to implement this requirement for all public meetings, and the bill sets a deadline for compliance of 2030. The bill allows for hardship waivers until that deadline, as towns adapt. It also would establish a trust fund to provide grants to help municipalities upgrade their technology.

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This bill would continue the increase in participation in local government. It enhances democracy.

The League of Women Voters of Sharon-Stoughton [which includes the towns of Sharon and Stoughton] endorses H.3040/S.2024 and urges the legislature to act quickly to make hybrid public meetings the norm.

Joanne Blatte, Co-president, LWV of Sharon-Stoughton

Robin Zoll, Co-president, LWV of Sharon-Stoughton



League of Women Voters of Sudbury Supports Hybrid Public Meetings

The League of Women Voters of Sudbury supports H.3040/S.2024, An Act to modernize participation in public meetings, which would require that meetings covered by the open meeting law be held in a hybrid format, both in-person and with the option to observe and participate remotely.

We understand that it may take time to implement this requirement for all public meetings, and the bill sets a deadline for compliance of 2030. The bill allows for hardship waivers until that deadline, as towns adapt. It also would establish a trust fund to provide grants to help municipalities upgrade their technology.

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This bill would continue the increase in participation in local government. It enhances democracy.

The League of Women Voters of Sudbury endorses H.3040/S.2024, and urges the legislature to act quickly to make hybrid public meetings the norm.

Linda Smith and Bonnie Glass

Co-Presidents



League of Women Voters of Wellesley Supports Hybrid Public Meetings

The League of Women Voters of Wellesley supports H.3040/S.2024, An Act to modernize participation in public meetings, which would require that meetings covered by the open meeting law be held in a hybrid format, both in-person and with the option to observe and participate remotely.

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This bill would continue the increase in participation in local government. It enhances democracy.

The League of Women Voters of Wellesley endorses H.3040/S.2024, and urges the legislature to act quickly to make hybrid public meetings the norm.

Wendy Harris Garber

President, LWVW



League of Women Voters of Westford Supports Hybrid Public Meetings

The League of Women Voters of Westford strongly supports H.3040/S.2024, An Act to modernize participation in public meetings, which would require that meetings covered by the open meeting law be held in a hybrid format, both in person and with the option to observe and participate remotely.

We understand that it may take time to implement this requirement for all public meetings, and the bill sets a deadline for compliance of 2030. The bill allows for hardship waivers until that deadline, as towns adapt. It also would establish a trust fund to provide grants to help municipalities upgrade their technology.

The ability to participate in meetings remotely greatly increased citizen awareness of their local governments during the pandemic. We believe in-person meetings are valuable, but remote capability is also necessary. Remote access allows many people to participate in their government who could not otherwise do so, including seniors, people with certain disabilities, and parents of young children who want to know what the School Committee is doing.

This bill would continue the increase in participation in local government. It enhances democracy.

The League of Women Voters of Westford endorses H.3040/S.2024, and urges the legislature to act quickly to make hybrid public meetings the norm.

League of Women Voters of Westford Steering Committee

Lynn Cohen
Laura Dickey
Vicky Geary
Erika Kohl
Gloria Miller



League of Women Voters of Winchester Supports Hybrid Public Meetings

The League of Women Voters of Winchester supports H.3040/S.2024, An Act to modernize participation in public meetings, which would require that meetings covered by the open meeting law be held in a hybrid format, both in-person and with the option to observe and participate remotely.

We understand that it may take time to implement this requirement for all public meetings, and the bill sets a deadline for compliance of 2030. The bill allows for hardship waivers until that deadline, as towns adapt. It also would establish a trust fund to provide grants to help municipalities upgrade their technology.

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This bill would continue the increase in participation in local government. It enhances democracy.

The League of Women Voters of Winchester endorses H.3040/S.2024, and urges the legislature to act quickly to make hybrid public meetings the norm.

Marilyn Mullane

Spokesperson

League of Women Voters of Winchester