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Before the Government, Administration & Elections Committee
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- **SB-1074, AN ACT CONCERNING VARIOUS PROVISIONS RELATED TO GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND COVID-19**
- **HB-6651, AN ACT RESPONDING TO ISSUES RELATED TO COVID-19 AND GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATIONS.**

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) *supports the intent* of the above-referenced bills aimed at addressing issues related to COVID-19 and government administration.

Connecticut's state, regional, and local government partners have worked together tirelessly to address challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. These partnership efforts will continue to be critical as we work together to position Connecticut for social and economic recovery to meet the needs of residents and businesses devastated by the pandemic.

To assist Connecticut's small towns and cities in meeting these challenges, COST supports legislation to allow municipalities to continue to hold virtual or hybrid in-person/virtual meetings following May 20 when the Governor's Executive Orders expire, unless otherwise extended.

Municipalities have relied on electronic technology to hold municipal meetings and hearings needed to adopt budgets, address critical fiscal matters, and consider and act on a wide range of municipal functions, including education, land use, public health and safety. This has ensured that local government operations could continue in an open and transparent way that engaged the public while reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

In towns where the legislative body is the town meeting, holding meetings via Zoom and other electronic platforms and hybrid meetings have been critical to approving local budgets and holding annual meetings to act on other matters. Time is of the essence, however, in authorizing municipalities to continue to use remote/hybrid meetings because towns are in the middle of crafting and adopting local budgets and concerns regarding the risk of COVID-19 transmission remain.



Given the uncertainty associated with the pandemic and whether there will be a resurgence, municipalities would like to continue to use electronic technology to hold municipal meetings and hearings. Although existing law provides for public meetings “whether in person or by means of electronic equipment”, this has not been interpreted to include fully remote or hybrid remote/in-person meetings.

In 1980, the Freedom of Information Commission (FOIC) issued Advisory Opinion 41 relative to this provision, which contemplated allowing members to participate telephonically, the technology of the time. However, the platforms in use now are very different and municipalities need clear authority and guidance in holding remote and hybrid meetings in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act.

COST stands ready to work with lawmakers, the FOIC and other stakeholders to discuss issues to ensure that municipalities can continue to hold remote and hybrid meetings in a way that facilitates public access without creating ambiguous or difficult compliance burdens.

We are also reviewing the various Executive Orders affecting local government operations to determine which orders should be codified or extended.