



June 20, 2023

The Honorable Gregg Hart
California State Assembly
1021 O Street, Room 6230
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Assembly Bill 557 (Hart) – Support [As Amended June 19, 2023]
Hearing Date: June 27, 2023 – *Senate Judiciary Committee*

Dear Assembly Member Hart:

The California Special Districts Association (CSDA), the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), the California School Boards Association (CSBA), and the League of California Cities (CalCities) are proud to sponsor Assembly Bill 557, related to emergency remote meeting procedures under the Ralph M. Brown Act.

The changes made to California Government Code section 54953 by Assembly Bill 361 (R. Rivas, 2021) were of vital importance to local agencies looking to meet during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to continue to conduct the people’s business. These changes were necessary in order to permit local agencies to meet during a time that it would have otherwise been impossible to meet in-person safely. Important safeguards were included to ensure transparency and accountability, including the fact that the emergency provisions were only applicable in instances where the California Governor had declared a state of emergency.

While California seeks to transition to a post-COVID era, the threat of additional emergencies remains, as has been made abundantly clear by recent flooding and wildfires. Absent any legislative intervention, the processes established by AB 361 to provide remote meeting flexibility to local agencies in emergency circumstances will expire at the end of this year. To remain best equipped to address future emergencies and allow local agencies to effectively react and respond, AB 557 would eliminate the sunset on the emergency remote meeting procedures added to California Government Code section 54953. Additionally, AB 557 would adjust the timeframe for the resolutions passed to renew an agency’s temporary transition to emergency remote meetings to 45 days, up from the previous number of 30 days.

This legislation will preserve an effective tool for local agencies facing emergencies that would otherwise prevent them from conducting the people’s business when faced with an emergency.

Amendments to the bill following its passage out of the Senate Governance and Finance Committee strike references to social distancing, eliminating any chance at interpreting the emergency remote meeting procedures as providing for a continuation of remote meetings absent an underlying state of emergency declaration. Devoid of any mention of social distancing, the bill strikes references to the practice utilized to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic; these and similar safety conditions are appropriately encapsulated under the general pretext for transitioning to emergency remote meeting procedures (i.e., that the state of emergency directly impacts the ability of members to meet safely in person). In this way, the bill continues to improve the efficacy of the underlying emergency remote meeting procedures while also making technical changes to accommodate received feedback.

For these reasons, the California Special Districts Association, the California State Association of Counties, the California School Boards Association, and the League of California Cities are pleased to sponsor Assembly Bill 557. If you have any questions about this letter or our position, please contact CSDA Legislative Representative Marcus Detwiler at marcusd@csda.net, CSAC Legislative Advocate Kalyn Dean at kdean@counties.org, CSDA Legislative Advocate Carlos Machado at cmachado@csba.org, and CalCities Legislative Affairs Lobbyist Jonnie Piña at jpiña@calcities.org.

Sincerely,

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