

November 3, 2022

The Honorable Elizabeth B. Bennett-Parker
107 South West Street, #152
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Delegate Bennett-Parker:

The Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC) greatly appreciates your efforts this past year to seek and secure additional flexibility in the use of electronic meetings by governing and other public bodies at the local and regional level. At its meeting held on this date, the TJPDC unanimously endorsed this letter to communicate to you our support for further flexibility for local governments to use electronic meetings. Our local governments have seen firsthand that electronic meetings have increased participation by members of the public, removing such barriers as transportation and childcare, and we believe that has led to a more equitable, accessible and transparent government. The making of public policy is enhanced when residents with diverse voices and experiences can participate in their government, either by attending a meeting or through direct service on a board, committee or commission.

We also want to note, in particular, that all of our jurisdictions have advisory boards or committees to which the local governing body appoints local residents. Accordingly, we support your efforts to allow such bodies to be free of restrictions on the number of virtual meetings they can hold in a given year. Increased flexibility would help these local advisory bodies to be more effective or to respond to unexpected issues that may arise, while maintaining current meeting notice requirements.

Our bottom-line request is simple: that local governments be given the authority to determine how our public bodies use electronic meetings, all while ensuring that public notice and transparency requirements are met. Being allowed to do so can be a benefit for the public at large and for citizen participation, as well as the public body, all while meeting the Freedom of Information Act's goal of promoting "an increased awareness by all persons of government activities and afford every opportunity to citizens to witness the operations of government."

Again, we thank you for your efforts and appreciate your consideration of our position and recommendations as you press forward with legislation in the coming General Assembly session. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Ned Gallaway, Chair
Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission

cc: TJPDC Legislators