

Natick Select Board

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LOCATED AT
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Natick, Massachusetts
01760

Town of Natick • Select Board Office

June 2, 2021

Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight
c/o Jamie Howell-Walton
via email: jamie.howell-walton@mahouse.gov

RE: Bill S.2104 An Act updating the Open Meeting Law to support remote participation

Dear Committee members,

On behalf of the Town of Natick and its Select Board, please accept this letter of support for the pending legislation proposing to amend certain open meeting law requirements allowing for remote participation, as outlined in Senate Bill 2104: An Act Updating the Open Meeting Law to Support Remote Participation.

The Natick community benefited greatly during the Covid-19 pandemic from the executive order that amended the open meeting law to allow for remote participation and engagement. These measures allowed for the uninterrupted continuation of essential local government work, and provided a new avenue for citizens to participate with their local public officials. Natick, like many of our fellow municipalities, saw significant increases in attendance at public meetings, allowing for greater transparency and building of trust in local processes and decision making. Citizens who prior to the pandemic were unable to attend public meetings and provide input on issues were able to remotely participate, leading to a more inclusive, engaged and informed population. Further, allowing for the members of the public body to remotely create a quorum and participate provided for greater flexibility and inclusiveness in local government, affording the ability to more quickly respond to emerging issues, and thus better serving the community.

Remote participation, both for the public and for public body members, is also an essential component to building equity and diversity within our government by making it easier for people from all demographics and backgrounds to attend and participate in the public process. A primary deterrent limiting public engagement with non-virtual meetings is the ability for an individual to physically attend a meeting, whether due to lack of transportation accommodations, care-giver responsibilities, financial considerations, or simply time. Virtual meetings are an equalizing tool allowing more people to volunteer, engage with, and participate in their local government. Continuing the ability to remotely

participate in public meetings is essential to advancing our government for the benefit of all citizens of Natick and Commonwealth.

The Town of Natick strongly supports the proposed Senate Bill 2104 and looks forward to continuing to engage with the local population through remote and in person participation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Karen Adelman-Foster".

Karen Adelman-Foster
Natick Select Board Chair

CC: Senator Karen Spilka
Senator Rebecca Rausch
Representative David Linsky