

Public Law Alert
April 3, 2023

**EXTENSION OF MUNICIPAL RELIEF MEASURES - INCLUDING OPEN MEETING
LAW REMOTE OPTION - SIGNED BY THE GOVERNOR**

The option for public bodies in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to hold public meetings remotely or in a hybrid fashion, which came into play at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, has been extended by the General Court for another two years, until March 31, 2025. The Governor signed the legislation, which will be codified at Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023, on March 29, 2023. Because of the inclusion of an emergency preamble, the law goes into effect immediately.

This new law allows public bodies to continue providing adequate, alternative means of public access to deliberations by a public body as opposed to in person. Such adequate, alternative means include but are not limited to access through telephone, internet, satellite-enabled audio or video conferencing, or other technology enabling the public to access the proceedings of the public body in real time. Members of a public body will also be able to continue participating in meetings remotely.

In addition to extending the remote meeting provisions, the law also extends the authorization for representative Town Meetings to be held by remote means, if the moderator makes a required finding. New to this law is a provision that representative Town Meetings may be held by hybrid means – previous representative Town Meetings were required to be 100% remote or 100% in person.

Over the next two years, the General Court will continue to work on permanent changes to the Open Meeting Law and the laws governing Town Meeting, so that these provisions might eventually be codified. The public and the municipalities themselves continue to ask for permanent provisions that provide greater access to public meetings such as remote or hybrid access.

This Client Alert was prepared by Mariem Marquetti and Karis North. This Alert was reviewed with Kevin Bresnahan and Peter Mello. If you have any questions about this issue, please contact Karis North or the attorney responsible for your account, or call (617) 479-5000.

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Phone (617) 479-5000

Fax (617) 479-6469

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