



August 12, 2022

Senate President Karen Spilka  
House Speaker Ronald Mariano  
Sen. Michael Rodrigues, Chair, Senate Ways & Means Committee  
Rep. Aaron Michlewitz, Chair, House Ways & Means Committee

**Re: Please override veto of \$30M bond authorization for Municipal IT Infrastructure**

Dear President Spilka, Speaker Mariano, and Chairs Rodrigues and Michlewitz:

Our organizations were shocked and deeply dismayed that Governor Baker vetoed funding that the legislature authorized in the infrastructure bond bill (H.5065, *An Act Financing the General Governmental Infrastructure of the Commonwealth*) to improve municipal IT systems and strengthen remote access to public meetings. We respectfully request that you override this veto and restore this vital investment in our cities and towns and equitable civic engagement.

For the first time ever, during the COVID pandemic, many people who had previously been excluded from participation in local government because they could not attend meetings in person were suddenly able to engage via remote means in conversations that directly impacted their lives. Across the Commonwealth, remote access to public meetings has significantly increased public participation in state and local government, and has lowered long-standing barriers for people with disabilities, people with limited access to transportation, and people with work and family obligations.

We cannot go back to requiring that people be physically present in order to participate in their local government. For this reason, we are so appreciative that the Legislature had the foresight to establish a new line item (1100-2517) in the general bond bill to

allocate \$30M to support municipal IT infrastructure for public meetings. We hope you will not let the governor's unjustifiable veto stand.

We are deeply grateful for the Legislature's consistent leadership on this issue: extending the current law that allows for remote access; grappling with the need for permanent Open Meeting Law reforms to guarantee equitable opportunities for civic engagement in the future and provide clarity for public officials; and treating the issue with urgency by setting a short deadline of March 31, 2023 for further action.

Your investment in the bond bill to improve the technological capacity of our cities and towns to conduct accessible public meetings could not be more timely. As the Commonwealth moves forward, many municipalities want to make the most of new civic engagement, continue to protect public health, and improve both access and equity by combining traditional in-person meetings with tech-supported remote participation. But cities and towns need financial and technical assistance to be able to provide this important kind of access. When a new administration is installed in the corner office in January, they should be able to hit the ground running to meet the needs of local leaders and residents who want to remove barriers to democratic participation.

We urge you to restore the full funding of Line Item 1100-2517 *this session*.

Sincerely,

*ACLU of Massachusetts*  
*Boston Center for Independent Living*  
*Common Cause Massachusetts*  
*Disability Law Center*  
*League of Women Voters of Massachusetts*  
*Massachusetts Newspaper Publishers Association*  
*MASSPIRG*  
*Metropolitan Area Planning Council*  
*New England First Amendment Coalition*  
*New England Newspaper & Press Association*

Cc: Rep. Danielle Gregoire  
Sen. William Brownsberger  
Rep. Antonio Cabral  
Sen. Marc Pacheco  
Rep. Denise Garlick  
Sen. Jason Lewis