



**To:** Hon. Speaker Ron Mariano, Hon. House Chair of Ways and Means Aaron Michlewitz, Hon. House Chair of State Administration and Regulatory Oversight Tony Cabral

**Date:** July 23, 2024

**Subject:** Please pass Open Meeting reforms again

Dear Speaker Mariano, Chair Michlewitz, and Chair Cabral,

Thank you for the House's leadership on issues of transparency and government accessibility.

We were grateful that the House adopted reforms last session to modernize the Open Meeting Law by requiring hybrid meeting access for members of the public. While these permanent reforms were ultimately deferred in favor of continuing the current temporary exceptions to the in-person meeting requirement until March 2025, guaranteeing hybrid access remains a critical way to ensure that ALL people — especially people with disabilities, people with caregiving responsibilities, and people with limited transportation — can follow and participate in government activity that directly impacts their lives.

The proof of the public benefits of hybrid access are obvious to anyone who has followed legislative hearings this session. People from all walks of life, and all over the state, have been able to watch and testify during committee proceedings. We deeply appreciate the House's leadership in ensuring that committee hearings are accessible remotely in addition to in person.

We hope you will cement the House's leadership on these issues of transparency and access before the end of this legislative session. We applaud Chair Cabral for again advancing Open Meeting Law reforms out of the State Administration and Regulatory Oversight Committee, and we respectfully urge you to pass that legislation (H.4771, praised in the article below), either as a stand-alone bill or as an amendment to another piece of legislation, before the end of the formal session on July 31, 2024.

Thank you,

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



## Meeting Access Bill On Move As Session Winds Down

Colin A. Young - Jun 27, 2024

*A legislative committee this week advanced a bill updating the Open Meeting Law to permanently enable members of the public to access and participate in public meetings remotely, moving it to the House Ways and Means Committee.*

*The Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight gave a favorable report to a redrafted bill ([H 4771](#)) that incorporates part of bills that had been touted by the ACLU of Massachusetts and other advocacy groups. Disability rights and free press organizations said the legislation is essential to maintaining civic engagement and removing barriers for people with disabilities and non-traditional work schedules.*

*"This legislation is critical because it guarantees hybrid access instead of simply leaving it up to each body to conduct meetings according to personal preference. When a public body closes the door to remote access, in particular, they close the door to large groups of civic-minded residents. In the wake of the pandemic, too many government bodies have reverted to in-person-only meetings, disenfranchising people with disabilities and others," said the group that includes the ACLU, Boston Center for Independent Living, Common Cause Massachusetts, Disability Law Center, League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, Mass. Newspaper Publishers Association, MASSPIRG, and more.*

*The group added, "We hope that when the legislature considers this legislation, they prioritize permanent reforms that guarantee hybrid public access as soon as possible. More transparent and accessible government means a stronger democracy for all."*

*Since the pandemic upended State House operations, Beacon Hill has taken some steps to be more accessible to citizens. The Legislature now holds hybrid hearings, allowing people an opportunity to testify before lawmakers virtually and without needing to get to Boston, and all sessions of the House and Senate are now livestreamed. Many state agencies have continued to hold virtual or hybrid meetings.*