



To: Hon. Speaker Ron Mariano

CC: Hon. Representative Aaron Michlewitz, Hon. Representative Tony Cabral

Date: February 19, 2025

Subject: Please pass Open Meeting Law reforms again to guarantee hybrid meetings

Dear Speaker Mariano:

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

Our organizations are grateful that the House adopted reforms in 2022 to modernize the Open Meeting Law (OML) 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 31, 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 local government activity that very directly impacts their lives.

We oppose as inadequate any legislation, including the Municipal Empowerment Act, that seeks only to make the pandemic remote meeting rules permanent. These rules fall short, because they only allow — but do not require — remote and hybrid meeting formats for public bodies under the OML. Enshrining the current pandemic rules would allow bodies to shut people out of public meetings and severely weaken the OML.

With the March 31 deadline looming, we ask that you support an extension of the deadline to the end of this legislative session to give the Legislature time to hold public hearings and deliberate and debate a strong bill that would guarantee



hybrid access for all Massachusetts residents who wish to engage in local and state government.

That's why we are uniting to throw our full support behind HD.368, filed by Rep. Tony Cabral, that would guarantee hybrid and remote meeting access under the OML. This bill is based directly on the language adopted by the House in 2022.

Our organizations know how sincerely you champion equity, inclusion, and access. We are hopeful that you'll partner with us to envision the best way to make hybrid and remote meeting access permanent under state law in a way that leaves no one out.

Thank you for your consideration,

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