



VERMONT LEGISLATIVE Joint Fiscal Office

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Fiscal Note

February 28, 2025

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S.55 – An act relating to authorizing public bodies to meet electronically under Vermont’s Open Meeting Law

As recommended by the Senate Committee on Government Operations, Draft 5.4

Bill Summary

This bill proposes to amend the Open Meeting Law to authorize public bodies to meet through electronic means without designating a physical meeting location.

Background and Details

The following section has a fiscal impact.

Section 8

This section would establish a Working Group on Participation and Accessibility of Municipal Public Meetings and Elections to study and make recommendations to improve the accessibility of and participation in meetings of local bodies, annual municipal meetings, and local elections.

The Group would be made up of two designees of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, two designees of the Vermont Municipal Clerks’ and Treasurers’ Association, one designee of the Vermont School Boards Association, one designee of Disability Rights Vermont, one designee of the Vermont Access Network, one member with expertise in remote and hybrid meeting technology appointed by the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Human Rights Commission or designee, and the Secretary of State or designee. On or before November 1, 2025 the Group would submit a written report with its findings and recommendations to the House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs and the Senate Committee on Government Operations.

Members would be entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses, as permitted under 32 V.S.A. § 1010, for not more than ten meetings. Total estimated costs are \$9,100.

Section 8 would appropriate \$50,000 from the General Fund in fiscal year 2025 for the purpose of hiring a consultant and for per diems and reimbursement expenses for members of the Working Group.

Costs for Remote Meeting Access

The cost of a video conferencing system can vary significantly depending on its size and complexity. There are setup costs for equipment, software, and training. Ongoing costs include internet, software subscriptions, data storage, and website hosting and maintenance.

| Minimum Setup Cost | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| Workstation | \$800 |
| External Monitor (TV or Projector) | \$1,000 |
| Internet Access (annual) | \$600 |
| Video Conferencing System | \$800 |
| Website Design | \$500 |
| Website Hosting & Domain (annual) | \$250 |
| Subtotal: | \$3,950 |
| Additional Setup Costs | |
| Data Storage Solution (annual) | \$250 |
| Networking Software (annual per user) | \$150 |
| Training | \$500 |
| Subtotal: | \$900 |
| Grand Total: | \$4,850 |

Each meeting may also have hourly costs for staff, IT support, translators, etc.

Vermont Town Data

Currently 91% of all Vermont cities, towns, and villages have an official municipal website for the purposes of governmental business.

As of April 2023, 75 municipalities in Vermont applied for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grant funding to improve or expand their online capabilities. These grants went toward creating or updating websites, networking software, video conferencing systems, and other IT improvements.