

City of Palo Alto

Office of the Mayor and City Council

May 14, 2021

The Honorable Blanca Rubio
California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 5175
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: Assembly Bill 703 (Rubio)
Support from the City of Palo Alto**

Dear Assemblymember Rubio,

On behalf of the City of Palo Alto, I am pleased to support your Assembly Bill 703, related to enhancing public access through teleconferencing in a public meeting setting.

As part of his response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Newsom issued Executive Order N-29-20 in March 2020 to expand public access to meetings of local agencies by suspending some of the restrictions on teleconferencing. This allowed local agencies to utilize teleconferencing for legislative body meetings and boards and commissions meetings and it has enhanced public access and increased public participation.


Unfortunately, once the Governor's Executive Order expires, local agencies will again be required to comply with antiquated provisions of existing law which make it much more difficult to hold meetings of the legislative body by teleconference. Current law refers to "teleconference locations" and requires various actions to be taken at "teleconference locations" by local governments wishing to utilize teleconference meetings. Current law does not recognize that a "teleconference location" is now wherever there is a person with a computer, a tablet, or even a mobile phone. Existing law also does not allow for an entire meeting to be conducted via teleconference though many local agencies and the public have grown accustomed to that as an option.

Assembly Bill 703 will eliminate the previously existing concept of teleconference locations and will revise notice requirements to allow for greater public participation in teleconference meetings of local agencies. The bill does not require teleconferencing, rather it modernizes existing law to ensure greater public participation in meetings of the legislative bodies of local agencies who choose to utilize teleconferencing.

This bill also expresses legislative intent to improve and enhance public access to local agency meetings, consistent with the digital age, by allowing broader access through teleconferencing options consistent with the Governor's Executive Order. Palo Alto has seen an increase in public participation in public meetings during this past year and the City would like to maintain that opportunity for additional participation and transparency in the future.

Thank you for introducing this important piece of legislation, and we are pleased to support Assembly Bill 703 and increase our flexibility with transparently conducting public meetings.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

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Tom DuBois, Mayor
City of Palo Alto

cc:

Josh Becker, Senator, California's 13th Senate District
Marc Berman, Assemblymember, California's 24th Assembly District
Seth Miller, Regional Public Affairs Manager, Peninsula Division, League of California Cities
Palo Alto City Council