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**HOUSE BILL 1056**

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**State of Washington 67th Legislature 2021 Regular Session**

**By** Representatives Pollet, Goehner, Kloba, Lekanoff, Leavitt, Senn, Callan, and Fey

AN ACT Relating to open public meeting notice requirements and declared emergencies; amending RCW 42.30.040, 42.30.050, 42.30.070, 42.30.077, 42.30.080, and 42.30.090; adding a new section to chapter 42.30 RCW; creating a new section; and declaring an emergency.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds and declares that, due to technological advances since the 1971 adoption of the open public meetings act, elected officials no longer conduct the public's business solely at in-person meetings, but can and do utilize telephonic and other electronic methods to efficiently conduct the business of state and local government remotely. Further, limitations on public gatherings required as the result of a disaster or emergency, for example, to assist in preventing the spread of infectious diseases, may affirmatively necessitate the use of technology and the avoidance of in-person attendance at public meetings for the conduct of governmental business. It is the policy of the state that a governing body's actions, including deliberations, shall be taken and conducted in the open. When the public cannot observe and participate in person, it may limit participation in democracy. Therefore, this act shall be construed in favor of ensuring access by the public to observe elected officials when they meet pursuant to this act. It is the intent of this act to modernize and update the open public meetings act emergency procedures to reflect technological advances, while maintaining the act's public policy that governing body's actions and deliberations be taken and conducted openly while balancing public safety in emergency conditions. Governing bodies are encouraged to adopt resolutions or ordinances establishing where and how meetings will be held in the event of an emergency, in order to allow the public to more easily learn about and observe public agency action in an emergent situation.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 42.30 RCW to read as follows:

(1) If, after the declaration of an emergency by a local or state government or agency, or by the federal government, a public agency determines that it cannot hold a meeting of the governing body with members or public attendance in person with reasonable safety because of the emergency, the public agency may:

(a) Hold a remote meeting of the governing body without a physical location; or

(b) Hold a meeting of the governing body at which the physical attendance by some or all members of the public is limited due to a declared emergency.

(2) During a remote meeting, members of the governing body may appear or attend by phone or by other electronic means that allows real-time verbal communication without being in the same physical location. For a remote meeting or a meeting at which the physical attendance by some or all members of the public is limited due to a declared emergency, the public agency must provide an option for the public to listen to the proceedings telephonically or by using a readily available alternative in real-time that does not require any additional cost for participation. Free readily available options include, but are not limited to, broadcast by the public agency on a locally available cable television station that is available throughout the jurisdiction or other electronic, internet, or other means of remote access that does not require any additional cost for access. The public agency may also allow the other electronic means of remote access.

(3) No action may be taken at a remote meeting or a meeting at which the physical attendance by some or all members of the public is limited due to a declared emergency if the public agency has not provided an option for the public to listen to proceedings pursuant to subsection (2) of this section, except for an executive session as authorized in this chapter.

(4) Notice of a remote meeting without a physical location or a meeting at which the physical attendance by some or all members of the public is limited due to a declared emergency must be provided in accordance with this chapter and must include instructions on how the public may listen live to proceedings and on how the public may access any other electronic means of remote access offered by the public agency.

(5) A remote meeting or a meeting at which the physical attendance by some or all members of the public is limited due to a declared emergency that is held under the provisions of this section shall be considered open and public in compliance with the requirements of this chapter. Nothing in this section alters the ability of public agencies to take expedited action in response to an emergency as provided for in RCW 42.30.070.

**Sec.**  RCW 42.30.040 and 2012 c 117 s 124 are each amended to read as follows:

A member of the public shall not be required, as a condition to attendance at a meeting of a governing body, to register his or her name and other information, to complete a questionnaire, or otherwise to fulfill any condition precedent to his or her attendance. This section does not prohibit any generally applicable conditions determined by the governing body to be reasonably necessary to protect the public health or safety, protect against interruption of the meeting, or as necessary to access the system used for a remote meeting or a meeting at which the physical attendance by some or all members of the public is limited due to a declared emergency.

**Sec.**  RCW 42.30.050 and 1971 ex.s. c 250 s 5 are each amended to read as follows:

In the event that any meeting is interrupted by a group or groups of persons so as to render the orderly conduct of such meeting unfeasible and order cannot be restored by the removal of individuals who are interrupting the meeting, the members of the governing body conducting the meeting may order the meeting room cleared and continue in session or may adjourn the meeting and reconvene at another location selected by majority vote of the members. In such a session, final disposition may be taken only on matters appearing on the agenda. Representatives of the press or other news media, except those participating in the disturbance, shall be allowed to attend any session held pursuant to this section. Nothing in this section shall prohibit the governing body from establishing a procedure for readmitting an individual or individuals not responsible for disturbing the orderly conduct of the meeting. Nothing in this section prohibits the governing body from stopping people from speaking to the governing body when not recognized by the governing body to speak.

**Sec.**  RCW 42.30.070 and 1983 c 155 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

The governing body of a public agency shall provide the time for holding regular meetings by ordinance, resolution, bylaws, or by whatever other rule is required for the conduct of business by that body. Unless otherwise provided for in the act under which the public agency was formed, meetings of the governing body need not be held within the boundaries of the territory over which the public agency exercises jurisdiction. If at any time any regular meeting falls on a holiday, such regular meeting shall be held on the next business day. If, by reason of fire, flood, earthquake, or other emergency, there is a need for expedited action by a governing body to meet the emergency, the presiding officer of the governing body may provide for a meeting site other than the regular meeting site, for a remote meeting without a physical location, or for a meeting at which the physical attendance by some or all members of the public is limited due to a declared emergency, and the notice requirements of this chapter shall be suspended during such emergency. It shall not be a violation of the requirements of this chapter for a majority of the members of a governing body to travel together or gather for purposes other than a regular meeting or a special meeting as these terms are used in this chapter: PROVIDED, That they take no action as defined in this chapter.

**Sec.**  RCW 42.30.077 and 2014 c 61 s 2 are each amended to read as follows:

Public agencies with governing bodies must make the agenda of each regular meeting of the governing body available online no later than ((~~twenty-four~~)) 24 hours in advance of the published start time of the meeting. An agency subject to provisions of this section ((~~is not required to post an agenda if it does not have a web site or if it employs fewer than ten full-time equivalent employees~~)) may share a website with, or have its website hosted by, another public agency to post meeting agendas, minutes, budgets, contact information, and other records, including any resolution or ordinance adopted by the agency establishing where and how the public agency will meet in the event of an emergency. Nothing in this section prohibits subsequent modifications to agendas nor invalidates any otherwise legal action taken at a meeting where the agenda was not posted in accordance with this section. Nothing in this section modifies notice requirements or shall be construed as establishing that a public body or agency's online posting of an agenda as required by this section is sufficient notice to satisfy public notice requirements established under other laws. Failure to post an agenda in accordance with this section shall not provide a basis for awarding attorney fees under RCW 42.30.120 or commencing an action for mandamus or injunction under RCW 42.30.130.

**Sec.**  RCW 42.30.080 and 2012 c 188 s 1 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) A special meeting may be called at any time by the presiding officer of the governing body of a public agency or by a majority of the members of the governing body by delivering written notice personally, by mail, by fax, or by ((~~electronic mail~~)) email to each member of the governing body. Written notice shall be deemed waived in the following circumstances:

(a) A member submits a written waiver of notice with the clerk or secretary of the governing body at or prior to the time the meeting convenes. A written waiver may be given by telegram, fax, or ((~~electronic mail~~)) email; or

(b) A member is actually present at the time the meeting convenes.

(2) Notice of a special meeting called under subsection (1) of this section shall be:

(a) Delivered to each local newspaper of general circulation and local radio or television station that has on file with the governing body a written request to be notified of such special meeting or of all special meetings;

(b) Posted on the agency's website. An agency is not required to post a special meeting notice on its website if it ((~~(i)~~)) does not have a website((~~; (ii)~~)) or share a website with another agency. Except in the case of a remote meeting or a meeting at which the physical attendance by some or all members of the public is limited due to a declared emergency as provided for in this chapter, an agency is not required to post a special meeting notice on its website if it employs ((~~fewer than ten~~)) no full-time equivalent employees((~~;~~)), or ((~~(iii)~~)) does not employ personnel whose duty, as defined by a job description or existing contract, is to maintain or update the website; and

(c) Prominently displayed at the main entrance of the agency's principal location and the meeting site if it is not held at the agency's principal location and is not held as a remote meeting; except that during a declared emergency which prevents a meeting from being held in-person with reasonable safety an agency that hosts a website or shares a website with another agency may instead post notice of a remote meeting without a physical location on the website hosted or shared by the agency.

Such notice must be delivered or posted, as applicable, at least ((~~twenty-four~~)) 24 hours before the time of such meeting as specified in the notice.

(3) The call and notices required under subsections (1) and (2) of this section shall specify the time and place of the special meeting and the business to be transacted. Final disposition shall not be taken on any other matter at such meetings by the governing body.

(4) The notices provided in this section may be dispensed with in the event a special meeting is called to deal with an emergency involving injury or damage to persons or property or the likelihood of such injury or damage, when time requirements of such notice would make notice impractical and increase the likelihood of such injury or damage, or when the required notice cannot be posted or displayed with reasonable safety, including but not limited to declared emergencies in which travel to physically post notice is barred or advised against.

**Sec.**  RCW 42.30.090 and 2012 c 117 s 125 are each amended to read as follows:

The governing body of a public agency may adjourn any regular, adjourned regular, special, or adjourned special meeting to a time and place specified in the order of adjournment. Less than a quorum may so adjourn from time to time. If all members are absent from any regular or adjourned regular meeting the clerk or secretary of the governing body may declare the meeting adjourned to a stated time and place. He or she shall cause a written notice of the adjournment to be given in the same manner as provided in RCW 42.30.080 for special meetings, unless such notice is waived as provided for special meetings. ((~~Whenever~~)) Except in the case of remote meetings without a physical location as provided for in this chapter, whenever any meeting is adjourned a copy of the order or notice of adjournment shall be conspicuously posted immediately after the time of the adjournment on or near the door of the place where the regular, adjourned regular, special, or adjourned special meeting was held. When a regular or adjourned regular meeting is adjourned as provided in this section, the resulting adjourned regular meeting is a regular meeting for all purposes. When an order of adjournment of any meeting fails to state the hour at which the adjourned meeting is to be held, it shall be held at the hour specified for regular meetings by ordinance, resolution, bylaw, or other rule.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  This act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes effect immediately.

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