

Assembly Bill 557

Remote Board Meetings

AB 557

Would extend the ability of local agencies to meet remotely, while also providing safeguards to ensure transparency and accountability.

Authored by Assemblymember Gregg Hart

Wildfires, floods, earthquakes and the COVID-19 pandemic have established the need for remote meetings when emergencies prevent local agencies from meeting in person.

AB 557, co-sponsored by CSBA, is a simple but important tool for local governments to remain accessible to the public during a governor-declared state of emergency and to continue to provide essential services to affected residents.

Why is it needed?

California is prone to disasters that can render in-person meetings dangerous if not impossible. The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the need for remote meetings in times of emergency. Under normal circumstances, the Brown Act requires in-person meetings, but AB 361 (Chapter 165, Statutes of 2021) established temporary exceptions allowing remote meetings when the governor declares a formal state of emergency. The provisions of AB 361 are set to expire at the end of 2023, but the reasons for allowing remote meetings during declared emergencies — like wildfires, floods, earthquakes and pandemics — remain.

How would it work?

AB 557 would extend the successful provisions of AB 361 beyond the end of 2023 by preserving the provision allowing remote meetings during a declared state of emergency. AB 557 also extends the time during which an agency could hold remote meetings during a time of emergency. Currently, an agency seeking to host remote meetings beyond a 30-day period must pass a resolution confirming the state of emergency that prompted the transition to remote meetings remains active and severe enough to prevent the agency from holding in-person meetings safely. AB 557 would extend the timeline to 45 days.

How would it help?

AB 557 would preserve an effective tool for local agencies that would otherwise be unable to conduct the people's business when faced with an emergency. The bill includes safeguards to ensure transparency and accountability as the provisions are only applicable when the governor has declared a state of emergency. During those dire circumstances, it's critical that local agencies be able to serve their constituents. Major emergencies are becoming more frequent and AB 557 gives local agencies the flexibility to remain responsive to the needs of the public in times of crisis.

