

This testimony is in support of HB 2560, requiring reasonable online access remotely to meetings of public bodies, and giving members of the public the opportunity to submit oral and written testimony for those meetings to the extent allowed. As a former lawyer from New Zealand, with 24 years in higher education teaching and administration, I like to stay abreast of many legislative changes, and have been to Salem and Washington DC to discuss various legislative proposals with the relevant people. However, even with an avid interest, it can be difficult to attend many hearings live with three kids, dogs, immune compromised household members, and scheduling conflicts. I am fortunate to have the flexibility to participate in the process more than others, but still am not able to participate as much as I would like. And I am not alone. By requiring in person presence at public hearings, many vitally important stakeholders are excluded from the decision making process, in particular working mothers, essential workers, and people with compromised health. For introverts and those with spectrum disorders who find large groups overwhelming, these events are painful and often simply impossible to attend. For immune compromised people, exposure to these large groups could be a death sentence. For caregivers, it is often be expensive to pay for childcare and transportation. For equity and inclusion, all voices should be heard at the table. There are many valid and vital stories that are being left untold and unheard. Covid-19 has been a dreadful trauma to our world, but it has forced us to quickly jump through innovative hoops to use technology in a way that many were unwilling to do. We have learned that technology can connect us in more ways than ever before, and just as meaningfully as if we were sharing the same air. Through this past year, we learned that we are better when we work together, and that sharing our stories makes us stronger as a society. I strongly feel that there is not only a need, but indeed a responsibility, to continue to use this technology moving forward, to start to address issues of equity and access to the legislative process. Please vote yes on HB 2560 and support a process that elevates more of the voices in our democracy. Thank you!