

Honorable Committee Members:

HB 2560A, which requires governing bodies to make public meetings accessible remotely through technological means, is yet another bill that sounds well-meaning and harmless on the face of it, but has the potential to negatively impact those communities and individuals who are already at a disadvantage.

The real question is why is this bill being proposed and who does it really benefit? It is clear that it will further empower the technically savvy and connected members of well-funded advocacy groups and professional lobbyists to further influence Oregon legislators during all public meetings. In their January newsletter, 1000 Friends of Oregon cited this "improved" access at the top of their agenda (along with training new land use advocates to add to their special interest group network).

HB 2560 does nothing to improve a citizen's ability to be better informed about bills, more engaged with the legislative process, or easier access to the OLIS website in order to testify. There is virtually no press coverage of the Oregon legislature. Public awareness of any bills under consideration is greatly limited as a result. This is not what "citizen involvement" looks like.

Providing testimony or comment requires special training and knowledge – to find and track the bill; understand it; know which committee is handling the bill; being informed about time and date of public testimony, etc. Announcements of public meetings is unpredictable and may be announced publicly within a few hours only on the OLIS website and only to those aware that they must be subscribed to be informed. Further, only those familiar with the legislative process know the difference between a "work session" and a "hearing" and the timing for a vote.

The bottom line: HB 2560A will significantly expand access to the same technically sophisticated, organized groups and make their voices even louder, while ordinary citizens and non-tech folks will be further marginalized. This is the height of irony with all the talk of inclusiveness with minority and disadvantaged community members.

This bill circumvents the public processes built into of SB 100 and Oregon Land Use Planning Goal 1, which requires public notice and local engagement in the formulation of Comp Plans and zone changes and participation in local regulation of land use decisions even at the neighborhood level.