



March 1, 2021

House Committee on Rules
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Testimony on HB 2560 (Remote Access to Public Meetings)

Dear Chair Smith Warner, Vice-Chair Drazan & Members of the House Committee on Rules:

Thrive Hood River (formerly Hood River Valley Residents Committee) is one of Oregon's oldest local land use advocacy groups. Since 1977 our mission has been to protect farms, forests, special wild places and the livability of urban and rural communities in Hood River County. We are writing to express our support for HB 2560 that makes permanent the current COVID-related emergency/temporary requirement that all local governments provide a remote access option for local public hearings and meetings.

A large part of our work is in support of Goal 1 (Citizen Involvement) of Oregon's Statewide Land Use Planning Goals. Goal 1 calls for "the opportunity for citizens to be involved in all phases of the planning process." We believe that bringing the public into the decisions that affect their lives makes for better decisions. However, the in-person nature of many meetings shuts out many members of the public. In a rural county like Hood River, many folks find it difficult or impossible to get to city hall or the county administration building where meetings are held because they have work or family obligations, they don't or can't drive, live far away, don't want to drive at night or when the weather is bad (it's not uncommon to have snow in Parkdale but rain in Hood River where meetings are held). This bill would help level the playing field so that more people can track and participate in the important local government decisions that affect their lives.

We would go further, and encourage your committee to add a provision requiring local governments to make video and audio recordings of public hearings and meetings available on their websites. With Zoom and other remote platforms, it is very simple (literally a push of a button) to record meetings. Since the beginning of the Governor's orders on COVID, the City of Hood River and Hood River County have both routinely posted recordings of their meetings to their websites. In Hood River, a surprising number of community members review these recordings to stay up to date on their local government.

We encourage you to vote yes on HB 2560.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Heather Staten'.

Heather Staten
Executive Director