

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 361 (Robert Rivas)

As Amended September 3, 2021

2/3 vote. Urgency

SUMMARY

Allows, until January 1, 2024, local agencies to use teleconferencing without complying with specified Ralph. M Brown Act restrictions in certain state emergencies, and provides similar authorizations, until January 31, 2022, for state agencies subject to the Bagley-Keene Open Meetings Act and legislative bodies subject to the Gloria Romero Open Meetings Act of 2000.

Senate Amendments

- 1) Add language amending the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act and the Gloria Romero Open Meetings Act of 2000 to suspend, until January 31, 2022, specified requirements of those acts, including requirements that each teleconference location be accessible to the public and that members of the public be able to address the legislative body at each teleconference location, as specified.
- 2) Make the following changes to the provisions of the bill governing local agency meetings under the Brown Act:
 - a) Narrow the provisions of the bill to only apply during state-declared emergencies and make conforming changes.
 - b) Clarify that an individual desiring to provide public comment through the use of an online platform may be required to register by that online platform, as specified, and clarifies additional requirements for such registration.
 - c) Clarify requirements for timed and untimed public comment periods, as specified.
 - d) Add a sunset date of January 1, 2024.
- 3) Add an urgency clause.
- 4) Add language to address chaptering issues with AB 339 (Lee and Cristina Garcia) of the current legislative session.

COMMENTS

The Brown Act allows the legislative body of a local agency to use teleconferencing for the benefit of the public and the legislative body in connection with any meeting or proceeding authorized by law. The teleconferenced meeting or proceeding must comply with all requirements of the Brown Act and all otherwise applicable provisions of law relating to a specific type of meeting or proceeding. Teleconferencing may be used for all purposes in connection with any meeting within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body. All votes taken during a teleconferenced meeting must be taken by rollcall.

If a legislative body of a local agency elects to use teleconferencing, it must post agendas at all teleconference locations and conduct teleconference meetings in a manner that protects the

statutory and constitutional rights of the parties or the public appearing before the legislative body of a local agency. Each teleconference location must be identified in the notice and agenda of the meeting or proceeding, and each teleconference location shall be accessible to the public.

During the teleconference, at least a quorum of the members of the legislative body must participate from locations within the boundaries of the territory over which the local agency exercises jurisdiction, with specified exceptions. The agenda must provide an opportunity for members of the public at each teleconference location to address the legislative body directly pursuant to the Brown Act's provisions governing public comment.

In March of 2020, the Governor issued Executive Order N-29-20, which stated that, "Notwithstanding any other provision of state or local law (including, but not limited to, the Bagley-Keene Act or the Brown Act), and subject to the notice and accessibility requirements set forth below, a local legislative body or state body is authorized to hold public meetings via teleconferencing and to make public meetings accessible telephonically or otherwise electronically to all members of the public seeking to observe and to address the local legislative body or state body. All requirements in both the Bagley-Keene Act and the Brown Act expressly or impliedly requiring the physical presence of members, the clerk or other personnel of the body, or of the public as a condition of participation in or quorum for a public meeting are hereby waived.

"All of the foregoing provisions concerning the conduct of public meetings shall apply only during the period in which state or local public health officials have imposed or recommended social distancing measures."

According to the Author

"When the COVID-19 pandemic started, public agencies struggled to conduct their meetings in compliance with the public accessibility and transparency requirements of the Brown Act and Bagley-Keene Acts while still abiding by stay-at-home orders. As a result, Governor Newsom issued several executive orders (EOs) to grant agencies the flexibility to meet remotely during the pandemic. However, these EOs are expiring soon, meaning that these flexibilities will not apply to future emergencies like wildfires, floods, pandemics, or other events that make in-person gatherings dangerous. Local and state agencies will again struggle to provide essential services like water, power, and fire protection at a time when constituents will need those services the most.

"AB 361 will guarantee that local and state bodies can meet the needs of the communities they serve by allowing them to temporarily hold meetings remotely. This bill will also require the opportunity for public to join via telephone or video conference to ensure that all members of the public can participate safely."

Arguments in Support

A coalition of supporters, including the California Special Districts Association (sponsor), the California State Association of Counties, the League of California Cities, and others, writes, "AB 361 would codify portions of the Governor of California's Executive Orders ('the Orders') from March 2020 relating to the Ralph M. Brown Act ('the Brown Act'), which made it safe for local agencies to meet. The Orders limited their operation to the time period during which state or local public health officials have imposed or recommend social distancing measures. In similar fashion, the provisions of this bill are operative only in circumstances when it is unsafe for the members of the legislative body of the local agency to meet in person. The bill's provisions are

only able to be utilized pursuant to a formal state of emergency, and the declared emergency must directly threaten the safety of the agency members, staff, or the public. By establishing such an extraordinarily high standard for agencies to meet remotely, this bill avoids creating a 'one-size-fits-all' approach that would otherwise apply in all future emergencies. An agency would not be able to rely upon these provisions to meet remotely if the emergency does not pose a threat to the agency."

Arguments in Opposition

A coalition of opponents, including ACLU California Action, Californians Aware, the First Amendment Coalition, and others state, "We appreciate that under circumstances like the recent public health emergency accommodations may temporarily be needed to allow local governments to conduct necessary business. Nevertheless, deleting fundamental and longstanding public protections should be extremely rare and highly circumscribed.

Unfortunately, AB 361 goes too far by exempting local governments from simple and important obligations to identify the location of each teleconference location, to make the teleconference locations accessible to the public, and to require that a quorum participate within the geographic boundaries of the body's jurisdiction. Moreover, the conditions under which these obligations would be canceled are far too lax."

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, pursuant to Senate Rule 28.8, negligible state costs.

VOTES:

ASM LOCAL GOVERNMENT: 7-0-1

YES: Aguiar-Curry, Bloom, Boerner Horvath, Ramos, Luz Rivas, Robert Rivas, Voepel

ABS, ABST OR NV: Lackey

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 62-4-12

YES: Aguiar-Curry, Arambula, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Bloom, Boerner Horvath, Burke, Carrillo, Cervantes, Chau, Chiu, Choi, Cooley, Cooper, Cunningham, Daly, Frazier, Friedman, Gallagher, Cristina Garcia, Eduardo Garcia, Gipson, Lorena Gonzalez, Grayson, Holden, Irwin, Jones-Sawyer, Kiley, Lackey, Lee, Levine, Low, Maienschein, Mathis, McCarty, Medina, Mullin, Muratsuchi, Nazarian, O'Donnell, Petrie-Norris, Quirk, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Reyes, Luz Rivas, Robert Rivas, Rodriguez, Blanca Rubio, Salas, Santiago, Seyarto, Stone, Ting, Villapudua, Voepel, Waldron, Ward, Akilah Weber, Wicks, Rendon

NO: Bigelow, Megan Dahle, Davies, Nguyen

ABS, ABST OR NV: Calderon, Chen, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gray, Kalra, Mayes, Patterson, Smith, Valladares, Wood

UPDATED

VERSION: September 3, 2021

CONSULTANT: Angela Mapp / L. GOV. / (916) 319-3958

FN: 0001989

Assembly Bill No. 361

Passed the Assembly September 10, 2021

Chief Clerk of the Assembly

Passed the Senate September 10, 2021

Secretary of the Senate

This bill was received by the Governor this _____ day
of _____, 2021, at _____ o'clock _____M.

Private Secretary of the Governor

CHAPTER _____

An act to add and repeal Section 89305.6 of the Education Code, and to amend, repeal, and add Section 54953 of, and to add and repeal Section 11133 of, the Government Code, relating to open meetings, and declaring the urgency thereof, to take effect immediately.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 361, Robert Rivas. Open meetings: state and local agencies: teleconferences.

(1) Existing law, the Ralph M. Brown Act requires, with specified exceptions, that all meetings of a legislative body of a local agency, as those terms are defined, be open and public and that all persons be permitted to attend and participate. The act contains specified provisions regarding the timelines for posting an agenda and providing for the ability of the public to directly address the legislative body on any item of interest to the public. The act generally requires all regular and special meetings of the legislative body be held within the boundaries of the territory over which the local agency exercises jurisdiction, subject to certain exceptions. The act allows for meetings to occur via teleconferencing subject to certain requirements, particularly that the legislative body notice each teleconference location of each member that will be participating in the public meeting, that each teleconference location be accessible to the public, that members of the public be allowed to address the legislative body at each teleconference location, that the legislative body post an agenda at each teleconference location, and that at least a quorum of the legislative body participate from locations within the boundaries of the local agency's jurisdiction. The act provides an exemption to the jurisdictional requirement for health authorities, as defined. The act authorizes the district attorney or any interested person, subject to certain provisions, to commence an action by mandamus or injunction for the purpose of obtaining a judicial determination that specified actions taken by a legislative body are null and void.

Existing law, the California Emergency Services Act, authorizes the Governor, or the Director of Emergency Services when the

governor is inaccessible, to proclaim a state of emergency under specified circumstances.

Executive Order No. N-29-20 suspends the Ralph M. Brown Act's requirements for teleconferencing during the COVID-19 pandemic provided that notice and accessibility requirements are met, the public members are allowed to observe and address the legislative body at the meeting, and that a legislative body of a local agency has a procedure for receiving and swiftly resolving requests for reasonable accommodation for individuals with disabilities, as specified.

This bill, until January 1, 2024, would authorize a local agency to use teleconferencing without complying with the teleconferencing requirements imposed by the Ralph M. Brown Act when a legislative body of a local agency holds a meeting during a declared state of emergency, as that term is defined, when state or local health officials have imposed or recommended measures to promote social distancing, during a proclaimed state of emergency held for the purpose of determining, by majority vote, whether meeting in person would present imminent risks to the health or safety of attendees, and during a proclaimed state of emergency when the legislative body has determined that meeting in person would present imminent risks to the health or safety of attendees, as provided.

This bill would require legislative bodies that hold teleconferenced meetings under these abbreviated teleconferencing procedures to give notice of the meeting and post agendas, as described, to allow members of the public to access the meeting and address the legislative body, to give notice of the means by which members of the public may access the meeting and offer public comment, including an opportunity for all persons to attend via a call-in option or an internet-based service option, and to conduct the meeting in a manner that protects the statutory and constitutional rights of the parties and the public appearing before the legislative body. The bill would require the legislative body to take no further action on agenda items when there is a disruption which prevents the public agency from broadcasting the meeting, or in the event of a disruption within the local agency's control which prevents members of the public from offering public comments, until public access is restored. The bill would specify

that actions taken during the disruption are subject to challenge proceedings, as specified.

This bill would prohibit the legislative body from requiring public comments to be submitted in advance of the meeting and would specify that the legislative body must provide an opportunity for the public to address the legislative body and offer comment in real time. The bill would prohibit the legislative body from closing the public comment period and the opportunity to register to provide public comment, until the public comment period has elapsed or until a reasonable amount of time has elapsed, as specified. When there is a continuing state of emergency, or when state or local officials have imposed or recommended measures to promote social distancing, the bill would require a legislative body to make specified findings not later than 30 days after the first teleconferenced meeting pursuant to these provisions, and to make those findings every 30 days thereafter, in order to continue to meet under these abbreviated teleconferencing procedures.

Existing law prohibits a legislative body from requiring, as a condition to attend a meeting, a person to register the person's name, or to provide other information, or to fulfill any condition precedent to the person's attendance.

This bill would exclude from that prohibition, a registration requirement imposed by a third-party internet website or other online platform not under the control of the legislative body.

(2) Existing law, the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act, requires, with specified exceptions, that all meetings of a state body be open and public and all persons be permitted to attend any meeting of a state body. The act requires at least one member of the state body to be physically present at the location specified in the notice of the meeting.

The Governor's Executive Order No. N-29-20 suspends the requirements of the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act for teleconferencing during the COVID-19 pandemic, provided that notice and accessibility requirements are met, the public members are allowed to observe and address the state body at the meeting, and that a state body has a procedure for receiving and swiftly resolving requests for reasonable accommodation for individuals with disabilities, as specified.

This bill, until January 31, 2022, would authorize, subject to specified notice and accessibility requirements, a state body to

hold public meetings through teleconferencing and to make public meetings accessible telephonically, or otherwise electronically, to all members of the public seeking to observe and to address the state body. With respect to a state body holding a public meeting pursuant to these provisions, the bill would suspend certain requirements of existing law, including the requirements that each teleconference location be accessible to the public and that members of the public be able to address the state body at each teleconference location. Under the bill, a state body that holds a meeting through teleconferencing and allows members of the public to observe and address the meeting telephonically or otherwise electronically would satisfy any requirement that the state body allow members of the public to attend the meeting and offer public comment. The bill would require that each state body that holds a meeting through teleconferencing provide notice of the meeting, and post the agenda, as provided. The bill would urge state bodies utilizing these teleconferencing procedures in the bill to use sound discretion and to make reasonable efforts to adhere as closely as reasonably possible to existing law, as provided.

(3) Existing law establishes the various campuses of the California State University under the administration of the Trustees of the California State University, and authorizes the establishment of student body organizations in connection with the operations of California State University campuses.

The Gloria Romero Open Meetings Act of 2000 generally requires a legislative body, as defined, of a student body organization to conduct its business in a meeting that is open and public. The act authorizes the legislative body to use teleconferencing, as defined, for the benefit of the public and the legislative body in connection with any meeting or proceeding authorized by law.

This bill, until January 31, 2022, would authorize, subject to specified notice and accessibility requirements, a legislative body, as defined for purposes of the act, to hold public meetings through teleconferencing and to make public meetings accessible telephonically, or otherwise electronically, to all members of the public seeking to observe and to address the legislative body. With respect to a legislative body holding a public meeting pursuant to these provisions, the bill would suspend certain requirements of existing law, including the requirements that each teleconference

location be accessible to the public and that members of the public be able to address the legislative body at each teleconference location. Under the bill, a legislative body that holds a meeting through teleconferencing and allows members of the public to observe and address the meeting telephonically or otherwise electronically would satisfy any requirement that the legislative body allow members of the public to attend the meeting and offer public comment. The bill would require that each legislative body that holds a meeting through teleconferencing provide notice of the meeting, and post the agenda, as provided. The bill would urge legislative bodies utilizing these teleconferencing procedures in the bill to use sound discretion and to make reasonable efforts to adhere as closely as reasonably possible to existing law, as provided.

(4) This bill would declare the Legislature's intent, consistent with the Governor's Executive Order No. N-29-20, to improve and enhance public access to state and local agency meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic and future emergencies by allowing broader access through teleconferencing options.

(5) This bill would incorporate additional changes to Section 54953 of the Government Code proposed by AB 339 to be operative only if this bill and AB 339 are enacted and this bill is enacted last.

(6) The California Constitution requires local agencies, for the purpose of ensuring public access to the meetings of public bodies and the writings of public officials and agencies, to comply with a statutory enactment that amends or enacts laws relating to public records or open meetings and contains findings demonstrating that the enactment furthers the constitutional requirements relating to this purpose.

This bill would make legislative findings to that effect.

(7) Existing constitutional provisions require that a statute that limits the right of access to the meetings of public bodies or the writings of public officials and agencies be adopted with findings demonstrating the interest protected by the limitation and the need for protecting that interest.

This bill would make legislative findings to that effect.

(8) This bill would declare that it is to take effect immediately as an urgency statute.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 89305.6 is added to the Education Code, to read:

89305.6. (a) Notwithstanding any other provision of this article, and subject to the notice and accessibility requirements in subdivisions (d) and (e), a legislative body may hold public meetings through teleconferencing and make public meetings accessible telephonically, or otherwise electronically, to all members of the public seeking to observe and to address the legislative body.

(b) (1) For a legislative body holding a public meeting through teleconferencing pursuant to this section, all requirements in this article requiring the physical presence of members, the clerk or other personnel of the legislative body, or the public, as a condition of participation in or quorum for a public meeting, are hereby suspended.

(2) For a legislative body holding a public meeting through teleconferencing pursuant to this section, all of the following requirements in this article are suspended:

(A) Each teleconference location from which a member will be participating in a public meeting or proceeding be identified in the notice and agenda of the public meeting or proceeding.

(B) Each teleconference location be accessible to the public.

(C) Members of the public may address the legislative body at each teleconference conference location.

(D) Post agendas at all teleconference locations.

(E) At least one member of the legislative body be physically present at the location specified in the notice of the meeting.

(c) A legislative body that holds a meeting through teleconferencing and allows members of the public to observe and address the meeting telephonically or otherwise electronically, consistent with the notice and accessibility requirements in subdivisions (d) and (e), shall have satisfied any requirement that the legislative body allow members of the public to attend the meeting and offer public comment. A legislative body need not make available any physical location from which members of the public may observe the meeting and offer public comment.

(d) If a legislative body holds a meeting through teleconferencing pursuant to this section and allows members of

the public to observe and address the meeting telephonically or otherwise electronically, the legislative body shall also do both of the following:

(1) Implement a procedure for receiving and swiftly resolving requests for reasonable modification or accommodation from individuals with disabilities, consistent with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. Sec. 12101 et seq.), and resolving any doubt whatsoever in favor of accessibility.

(2) Advertise that procedure each time notice is given of the means by which members of the public may observe the meeting and offer public comment, pursuant to paragraph (2) of subdivision (e).

(e) Except to the extent this section provides otherwise, each legislative body that holds a meeting through teleconferencing pursuant to this section shall do both of the following:

(1) Give advance notice of the time of, and post the agenda for, each public meeting according to the timeframes otherwise prescribed by this article, and using the means otherwise prescribed by this article, as applicable.

(2) In each instance in which notice of the time of the meeting is otherwise given or the agenda for the meeting is otherwise posted, also give notice of the means by which members of the public may observe the meeting and offer public comment. As to any instance in which there is a change in the means of public observation and comment, or any instance prior to the effective date of this section in which the time of the meeting has been noticed or the agenda for the meeting has been posted without also including notice of the means of public observation and comment, a legislative body may satisfy this requirement by advertising the means of public observation and comment using the most rapid means of communication available at the time. Advertising the means of public observation and comment using the most rapid means of communication available at the time shall include, but need not be limited to, posting such means on the legislative body's internet website.

(f) All legislative bodies utilizing the teleconferencing procedures in this section are urged to use sound discretion and to make reasonable efforts to adhere as closely as reasonably possible to the otherwise applicable provisions of this article, in order to

maximize transparency and provide the public access to legislative body meetings.

(g) This section shall remain in effect only until January 31, 2022, and as of that date is repealed.

SEC. 2. Section 11133 is added to the Government Code, to read:

11133. (a) Notwithstanding any other provision of this article, and subject to the notice and accessibility requirements in subdivisions (d) and (e), a state body may hold public meetings through teleconferencing and make public meetings accessible telephonically, or otherwise electronically, to all members of the public seeking to observe and to address the state body.

(b) (1) For a state body holding a public meeting through teleconferencing pursuant to this section, all requirements in this article requiring the physical presence of members, the clerk or other personnel of the state body, or the public, as a condition of participation in or quorum for a public meeting, are hereby suspended.

(2) For a state body holding a public meeting through teleconferencing pursuant to this section, all of the following requirements in this article are suspended:

(A) Each teleconference location from which a member will be participating in a public meeting or proceeding be identified in the notice and agenda of the public meeting or proceeding.

(B) Each teleconference location be accessible to the public.

(C) Members of the public may address the state body at each teleconference conference location.

(D) Post agendas at all teleconference locations.

(E) At least one member of the state body be physically present at the location specified in the notice of the meeting.

(c) A state body that holds a meeting through teleconferencing and allows members of the public to observe and address the meeting telephonically or otherwise electronically, consistent with the notice and accessibility requirements in subdivisions (d) and (e), shall have satisfied any requirement that the state body allow members of the public to attend the meeting and offer public comment. A state body need not make available any physical location from which members of the public may observe the meeting and offer public comment.

(d) If a state body holds a meeting through teleconferencing pursuant to this section and allows members of the public to observe and address the meeting telephonically or otherwise electronically, the state body shall also do both of the following:

(1) Implement a procedure for receiving and swiftly resolving requests for reasonable modification or accommodation from individuals with disabilities, consistent with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. Sec. 12101 et seq.), and resolving any doubt whatsoever in favor of accessibility.

(2) Advertise that procedure each time notice is given of the means by which members of the public may observe the meeting and offer public comment, pursuant to paragraph (2) of subdivision (e).

(e) Except to the extent this section provides otherwise, each state body that holds a meeting through teleconferencing pursuant to this section shall do both of the following:

(1) Give advance notice of the time of, and post the agenda for, each public meeting according to the timeframes otherwise prescribed by this article, and using the means otherwise prescribed by this article, as applicable.

(2) In each instance in which notice of the time of the meeting is otherwise given or the agenda for the meeting is otherwise posted, also give notice of the means by which members of the public may observe the meeting and offer public comment. As to any instance in which there is a change in the means of public observation and comment, or any instance prior to the effective date of this section in which the time of the meeting has been noticed or the agenda for the meeting has been posted without also including notice of the means of public observation and comment, a state body may satisfy this requirement by advertising the means of public observation and comment using the most rapid means of communication available at the time. Advertising the means of public observation and comment using the most rapid means of communication available at the time shall include, but need not be limited to, posting such means on the state body's internet website.

(f) All state bodies utilizing the teleconferencing procedures in this section are urged to use sound discretion and to make reasonable efforts to adhere as closely as reasonably possible to the otherwise applicable provisions of this article, in order to

maximize transparency and provide the public access to state body meetings.

(g) This section shall remain in effect only until January 31, 2022, and as of that date is repealed.

SEC. 3. Section 54953 of the Government Code is amended to read:

54953. (a) All meetings of the legislative body of a local agency shall be open and public, and all persons shall be permitted to attend any meeting of the legislative body of a local agency, except as otherwise provided in this chapter.

(b) (1) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the legislative body of a local agency may use teleconferencing for the benefit of the public and the legislative body of a local agency in connection with any meeting or proceeding authorized by law. The teleconferenced meeting or proceeding shall comply with all otherwise applicable requirements of this chapter and all otherwise applicable provisions of law relating to a specific type of meeting or proceeding.

(2) Teleconferencing, as authorized by this section, may be used for all purposes in connection with any meeting within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body. All votes taken during a teleconferenced meeting shall be by rollcall.

(3) If the legislative body of a local agency elects to use teleconferencing, it shall post agendas at all teleconference locations and conduct teleconference meetings in a manner that protects the statutory and constitutional rights of the parties or the public appearing before the legislative body of a local agency. Each teleconference location shall be identified in the notice and agenda of the meeting or proceeding, and each teleconference location shall be accessible to the public. During the teleconference, at least a quorum of the members of the legislative body shall participate from locations within the boundaries of the territory over which the local agency exercises jurisdiction, except as provided in subdivisions (d) and (e). The agenda shall provide an opportunity for members of the public to address the legislative body directly pursuant to Section 54954.3 at each teleconference location.

(4) For the purposes of this section, “teleconference” means a meeting of a legislative body, the members of which are in different locations, connected by electronic means, through either audio or

video, or both. Nothing in this section shall prohibit a local agency from providing the public with additional teleconference locations.

(c) (1) No legislative body shall take action by secret ballot, whether preliminary or final.

(2) The legislative body of a local agency shall publicly report any action taken and the vote or abstention on that action of each member present for the action.

(3) Prior to taking final action, the legislative body shall orally report a summary of a recommendation for a final action on the salaries, salary schedules, or compensation paid in the form of fringe benefits of a local agency executive, as defined in subdivision (d) of Section 3511.1, during the open meeting in which the final action is to be taken. This paragraph shall not affect the public's right under the California Public Records Act (Chapter 3.5 (commencing with Section 6250) of Division 7 of Title 1) to inspect or copy records created or received in the process of developing the recommendation.

(d) (1) Notwithstanding the provisions relating to a quorum in paragraph (3) of subdivision (b), if a health authority conducts a teleconference meeting, members who are outside the jurisdiction of the authority may be counted toward the establishment of a quorum when participating in the teleconference if at least 50 percent of the number of members that would establish a quorum are present within the boundaries of the territory over which the authority exercises jurisdiction, and the health authority provides a teleconference number, and associated access codes, if any, that allows any person to call in to participate in the meeting and the number and access codes are identified in the notice and agenda of the meeting.

(2) Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed as discouraging health authority members from regularly meeting at a common physical site within the jurisdiction of the authority or from using teleconference locations within or near the jurisdiction of the authority. A teleconference meeting for which a quorum is established pursuant to this subdivision shall be subject to all other requirements of this section.

(3) For purposes of this subdivision, a health authority means any entity created pursuant to Sections 14018.7, 14087.31, 14087.35, 14087.36, 14087.38, and 14087.9605 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, any joint powers authority created pursuant

to Article 1 (commencing with Section 6500) of Chapter 5 of Division 7 for the purpose of contracting pursuant to Section 14087.3 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, and any advisory committee to a county-sponsored health plan licensed pursuant to Chapter 2.2 (commencing with Section 1340) of Division 2 of the Health and Safety Code if the advisory committee has 12 or more members.

(e) (1) A local agency may use teleconferencing without complying with the requirements of paragraph (3) of subdivision (b) if the legislative body complies with the requirements of paragraph (2) of this subdivision in any of the following circumstances:

(A) The legislative body holds a meeting during a proclaimed state of emergency, and state or local officials have imposed or recommended measures to promote social distancing.

(B) The legislative body holds a meeting during a proclaimed state of emergency for the purpose of determining, by majority vote, whether as a result of the emergency, meeting in person would present imminent risks to the health or safety of attendees.

(C) The legislative body holds a meeting during a proclaimed state of emergency and has determined, by majority vote, pursuant to subparagraph (B), that, as a result of the emergency, meeting in person would present imminent risks to the health or safety of attendees.

(2) A legislative body that holds a meeting pursuant to this subdivision shall do all of the following:

(A) The legislative body shall give notice of the meeting and post agendas as otherwise required by this chapter.

(B) The legislative body shall allow members of the public to access the meeting and the agenda shall provide an opportunity for members of the public to address the legislative body directly pursuant to Section 54954.3. In each instance in which notice of the time of the teleconferenced meeting is otherwise given or the agenda for the meeting is otherwise posted, the legislative body shall also give notice of the means by which members of the public may access the meeting and offer public comment. The agenda shall identify and include an opportunity for all persons to attend via a call-in option or an internet-based service option. This subparagraph shall not be construed to require the legislative body

to provide a physical location from which the public may attend or comment.

(C) The legislative body shall conduct teleconference meetings in a manner that protects the statutory and constitutional rights of the parties and the public appearing before the legislative body of a local agency.

(D) In the event of a disruption which prevents the public agency from broadcasting the meeting to members of the public using the call-in option or internet-based service option, or in the event of a disruption within the local agency's control which prevents members of the public from offering public comments using the call-in option or internet-based service option, the body shall take no further action on items appearing on the meeting agenda until public access to the meeting via the call-in option or internet-based service option is restored. Actions taken on agenda items during a disruption which prevents the public agency from broadcasting the meeting may be challenged pursuant to Section 54960.1.

(E) The legislative body shall not require public comments to be submitted in advance of the meeting and must provide an opportunity for the public to address the legislative body and offer comment in real time. This subparagraph shall not be construed to require the legislative body to provide a physical location from which the public may attend or comment.

(F) Notwithstanding Section 54953.3, an individual desiring to provide public comment through the use of an internet website, or other online platform, not under the control of the local legislative body, that requires registration to log in to a teleconference may be required to register as required by the third-party internet website or online platform to participate.

(G) (i) A legislative body that provides a timed public comment period for each agenda item shall not close the public comment period for the agenda item, or the opportunity to register, pursuant to subparagraph (F), to provide public comment until that timed public comment period has elapsed.

(ii) A legislative body that does not provide a timed public comment period, but takes public comment separately on each agenda item, shall allow a reasonable amount of time per agenda item to allow public members the opportunity to provide public comment, including time for members of the public to register

pursuant to subparagraph (F), or otherwise be recognized for the purpose of providing public comment.

(iii) A legislative body that provides a timed general public comment period that does not correspond to a specific agenda item shall not close the public comment period or the opportunity to register, pursuant to subparagraph (F), until the timed general public comment period has elapsed.

(3) If a state of emergency remains active, or state or local officials have imposed or recommended measures to promote social distancing, in order to continue to teleconference without compliance with paragraph (3) of subdivision (b), the legislative body shall, not later than 30 days after teleconferencing for the first time pursuant to subparagraph (A), (B), or (C) of paragraph (1), and every 30 days thereafter, make the following findings by majority vote:

(A) The legislative body has reconsidered the circumstances of the state of emergency.

(B) Any of the following circumstances exist:

(i) The state of emergency continues to directly impact the ability of the members to meet safely in person.

(ii) State or local officials continue to impose or recommend measures to promote social distancing.

(4) For the purposes of this subdivision, “state of emergency” means a state of emergency proclaimed pursuant to Section 8625 of the California Emergency Services Act (Article 1 (commencing with Section 8550) of Chapter 7 of Division 1 of Title 2).

(f) This section shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2024, and as of that date is repealed.

SEC. 3.1. Section 54953 of the Government Code is amended to read:

54953. (a) All meetings of the legislative body of a local agency shall be open and public, and all persons shall be permitted to attend any meeting of the legislative body of a local agency in person, except as otherwise provided in this chapter. Local agencies shall conduct meetings subject to this chapter consistent with applicable state and federal civil rights laws, including, but not limited to, any applicable language access and other nondiscrimination obligations.

(b) (1) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the legislative body of a local agency may use teleconferencing for

the benefit of the public and the legislative body of a local agency in connection with any meeting or proceeding authorized by law. The teleconferenced meeting or proceeding shall comply with all otherwise applicable requirements of this chapter and all otherwise applicable provisions of law relating to a specific type of meeting or proceeding.

(2) Teleconferencing, as authorized by this section, may be used for all purposes in connection with any meeting within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body. All votes taken during a teleconferenced meeting shall be by rollcall.

(3) If the legislative body of a local agency elects to use teleconferencing, it shall post agendas at all teleconference locations and conduct teleconference meetings in a manner that protects the statutory and constitutional rights of the parties or the public appearing before the legislative body of a local agency. Each teleconference location shall be identified in the notice and agenda of the meeting or proceeding, and each teleconference location shall be accessible to the public. During the teleconference, at least a quorum of the members of the legislative body shall participate from locations within the boundaries of the territory over which the local agency exercises jurisdiction, except as provided in subdivisions (d) and (e). The agenda shall provide an opportunity for members of the public to address the legislative body directly pursuant to Section 54954.3 at each teleconference location.

(4) For the purposes of this section, “teleconference” means a meeting of a legislative body, the members of which are in different locations, connected by electronic means, through either audio or video, or both. Nothing in this section shall prohibit a local agency from providing the public with additional teleconference locations.

(c) (1) No legislative body shall take action by secret ballot, whether preliminary or final.

(2) The legislative body of a local agency shall publicly report any action taken and the vote or abstention on that action of each member present for the action.

(3) Prior to taking final action, the legislative body shall orally report a summary of a recommendation for a final action on the salaries, salary schedules, or compensation paid in the form of fringe benefits of a local agency executive, as defined in subdivision (d) of Section 3511.1, during the open meeting in

which the final action is to be taken. This paragraph shall not affect the public's right under the California Public Records Act (Chapter 3.5 (commencing with Section 6250) of Division 7 of Title 1) to inspect or copy records created or received in the process of developing the recommendation.

(d) (1) Notwithstanding the provisions relating to a quorum in paragraph (3) of subdivision (b), if a health authority conducts a teleconference meeting, members who are outside the jurisdiction of the authority may be counted toward the establishment of a quorum when participating in the teleconference if at least 50 percent of the number of members that would establish a quorum are present within the boundaries of the territory over which the authority exercises jurisdiction, and the health authority provides a teleconference number, and associated access codes, if any, that allows any person to call in to participate in the meeting and the number and access codes are identified in the notice and agenda of the meeting.

(2) Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed as discouraging health authority members from regularly meeting at a common physical site within the jurisdiction of the authority or from using teleconference locations within or near the jurisdiction of the authority. A teleconference meeting for which a quorum is established pursuant to this subdivision shall be subject to all other requirements of this section.

(3) For purposes of this subdivision, a health authority means any entity created pursuant to Sections 14018.7, 14087.31, 14087.35, 14087.36, 14087.38, and 14087.9605 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, any joint powers authority created pursuant to Article 1 (commencing with Section 6500) of Chapter 5 of Division 7 for the purpose of contracting pursuant to Section 14087.3 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, and any advisory committee to a county-sponsored health plan licensed pursuant to Chapter 2.2 (commencing with Section 1340) of Division 2 of the Health and Safety Code if the advisory committee has 12 or more members.

(e) (1) A local agency may use teleconferencing without complying with the requirements of paragraph (3) of subdivision (b) if the legislative body complies with the requirements of paragraph (2) of this subdivision in any of the following circumstances:

(A) The legislative body holds a meeting during a proclaimed state of emergency, and state or local officials have imposed or recommended measures to promote social distancing.

(B) The legislative body holds a meeting during a proclaimed state of emergency for the purpose of determining, by majority vote, whether as a result of the emergency, meeting in person would present imminent risks to the health or safety of attendees.

(C) The legislative body holds a meeting during a proclaimed state of emergency and has determined, by majority vote, pursuant to subparagraph (B), that, as a result of the emergency, meeting in person would present imminent risks to the health or safety of attendees.

(2) A legislative body that holds a meeting pursuant to this subdivision shall do all of the following:

(A) The legislative body shall give notice of the meeting and post agendas as otherwise required by this chapter.

(B) The legislative body shall allow members of the public to access the meeting and the agenda shall provide an opportunity for members of the public to address the legislative body directly pursuant to Section 54954.3. In each instance in which notice of the time of the teleconferenced meeting is otherwise given or the agenda for the meeting is otherwise posted, the legislative body shall also give notice of the means by which members of the public may access the meeting and offer public comment. The agenda shall identify and include an opportunity for all persons to attend via a call-in option or an internet-based service option. This subparagraph shall not be construed to require the legislative body to provide a physical location from which the public may attend or comment.

(C) The legislative body shall conduct teleconference meetings in a manner that protects the statutory and constitutional rights of the parties and the public appearing before the legislative body of a local agency.

(D) In the event of a disruption which prevents the public agency from broadcasting the meeting to members of the public using the call-in option or internet-based service option, or in the event of a disruption within the local agency's control which prevents members of the public from offering public comments using the call-in option or internet-based service option, the body shall take no further action on items appearing on the meeting agenda until

public access to the meeting via the call-in option or internet-based service option is restored. Actions taken on agenda items during a disruption which prevents the public agency from broadcasting the meeting may be challenged pursuant to Section 54960.1.

(E) The legislative body shall not require public comments to be submitted in advance of the meeting and must provide an opportunity for the public to address the legislative body and offer comment in real time. This subparagraph shall not be construed to require the legislative body to provide a physical location from which the public may attend or comment.

(F) Notwithstanding Section 54953.3, an individual desiring to provide public comment through the use of an internet website, or other online platform, not under the control of the local legislative body, that requires registration to log in to a teleconference may be required to register as required by the third-party internet website or online platform to participate.

(G) (i) A legislative body that provides a timed public comment period for each agenda item shall not close the public comment period for the agenda item, or the opportunity to register, pursuant to subparagraph (F), to provide public comment until that timed public comment period has elapsed.

(ii) A legislative body that does not provide a timed public comment period, but takes public comment separately on each agenda item, shall allow a reasonable amount of time per agenda item to allow public members the opportunity to provide public comment, including time for members of the public to register pursuant to subparagraph (F), or otherwise be recognized for the purpose of providing public comment.

(iii) A legislative body that provides a timed general public comment period that does not correspond to a specific agenda item shall not close the public comment period or the opportunity to register, pursuant to subparagraph (F), until the timed general public comment period has elapsed.

(3) If a state of emergency remains active, or state or local officials have imposed or recommended measures to promote social distancing, in order to continue to teleconference without compliance with paragraph (3) of subdivision (b), the legislative body shall, not later than 30 days after teleconferencing for the first time pursuant to subparagraph (A), (B), or (C) of paragraph

(1), and every 30 days thereafter, make the following findings by majority vote:

(A) The legislative body has reconsidered the circumstances of the state of emergency.

(B) Any of the following circumstances exist:

(i) The state of emergency continues to directly impact the ability of the members to meet safely in person.

(ii) State or local officials continue to impose or recommend measures to promote social distancing.

(4) For the purposes of this subdivision, “state of emergency” means a state of emergency proclaimed pursuant to Section 8625 of the California Emergency Services Act (Article 1 (commencing with Section 8550) of Chapter 7 of Division 1 of Title 2).

(f) This section shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2024, and as of that date is repealed.

SEC. 4. Section 54953 is added to the Government Code, to read:

54953. (a) All meetings of the legislative body of a local agency shall be open and public, and all persons shall be permitted to attend any meeting of the legislative body of a local agency, except as otherwise provided in this chapter.

(b) (1) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the legislative body of a local agency may use teleconferencing for the benefit of the public and the legislative body of a local agency in connection with any meeting or proceeding authorized by law. The teleconferenced meeting or proceeding shall comply with all requirements of this chapter and all otherwise applicable provisions of law relating to a specific type of meeting or proceeding.

(2) Teleconferencing, as authorized by this section, may be used for all purposes in connection with any meeting within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body. All votes taken during a teleconferenced meeting shall be by rollcall.

(3) If the legislative body of a local agency elects to use teleconferencing, it shall post agendas at all teleconference locations and conduct teleconference meetings in a manner that protects the statutory and constitutional rights of the parties or the public appearing before the legislative body of a local agency. Each teleconference location shall be identified in the notice and agenda of the meeting or proceeding, and each teleconference location shall be accessible to the public. During the teleconference,

at least a quorum of the members of the legislative body shall participate from locations within the boundaries of the territory over which the local agency exercises jurisdiction, except as provided in subdivision (d). The agenda shall provide an opportunity for members of the public to address the legislative body directly pursuant to Section 54954.3 at each teleconference location.

(4) For the purposes of this section, “teleconference” means a meeting of a legislative body, the members of which are in different locations, connected by electronic means, through either audio or video, or both. Nothing in this section shall prohibit a local agency from providing the public with additional teleconference locations

(c) (1) No legislative body shall take action by secret ballot, whether preliminary or final.

(2) The legislative body of a local agency shall publicly report any action taken and the vote or abstention on that action of each member present for the action.

(3) Prior to taking final action, the legislative body shall orally report a summary of a recommendation for a final action on the salaries, salary schedules, or compensation paid in the form of fringe benefits of a local agency executive, as defined in subdivision (d) of Section 3511.1, during the open meeting in which the final action is to be taken. This paragraph shall not affect the public’s right under the California Public Records Act (Chapter 3.5 (commencing with Section 6250) of Division 7 of Title 1) to inspect or copy records created or received in the process of developing the recommendation.

(d) (1) Notwithstanding the provisions relating to a quorum in paragraph (3) of subdivision (b), if a health authority conducts a teleconference meeting, members who are outside the jurisdiction of the authority may be counted toward the establishment of a quorum when participating in the teleconference if at least 50 percent of the number of members that would establish a quorum are present within the boundaries of the territory over which the authority exercises jurisdiction, and the health authority provides a teleconference number, and associated access codes, if any, that allows any person to call in to participate in the meeting and the number and access codes are identified in the notice and agenda of the meeting.

(2) Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed as discouraging health authority members from regularly meeting at a common physical site within the jurisdiction of the authority or from using teleconference locations within or near the jurisdiction of the authority. A teleconference meeting for which a quorum is established pursuant to this subdivision shall be subject to all other requirements of this section.

(3) For purposes of this subdivision, a health authority means any entity created pursuant to Sections 14018.7, 14087.31, 14087.35, 14087.36, 14087.38, and 14087.9605 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, any joint powers authority created pursuant to Article 1 (commencing with Section 6500) of Chapter 5 of Division 7 for the purpose of contracting pursuant to Section 14087.3 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, and any advisory committee to a county-sponsored health plan licensed pursuant to Chapter 2.2 (commencing with Section 1340) of Division 2 of the Health and Safety Code if the advisory committee has 12 or more members.

(e) This section shall become operative January 1, 2024.

SEC. 4.1. Section 54953 is added to the Government Code, to read:

54953. (a) All meetings of the legislative body of a local agency shall be open and public, and all persons shall be permitted to attend any meeting of the legislative body of a local agency, in person except as otherwise provided in this chapter. Local agencies shall conduct meetings subject to this chapter consistent with applicable state and federal civil rights laws, including, but not limited to, any applicable language access and other nondiscrimination obligations.

(b) (1) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the legislative body of a local agency may use teleconferencing for the benefit of the public and the legislative body of a local agency in connection with any meeting or proceeding authorized by law. The teleconferenced meeting or proceeding shall comply with all requirements of this chapter and all otherwise applicable provisions of law relating to a specific type of meeting or proceeding.

(2) Teleconferencing, as authorized by this section, may be used for all purposes in connection with any meeting within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body. All votes taken during a teleconferenced meeting shall be by rollcall.

(3) If the legislative body of a local agency elects to use teleconferencing, it shall post agendas at all teleconference locations and conduct teleconference meetings in a manner that protects the statutory and constitutional rights of the parties or the public appearing before the legislative body of a local agency. Each teleconference location shall be identified in the notice and agenda of the meeting or proceeding, and each teleconference location shall be accessible to the public. During the teleconference, at least a quorum of the members of the legislative body shall participate from locations within the boundaries of the territory over which the local agency exercises jurisdiction, except as provided in subdivision (d). The agenda shall provide an opportunity for members of the public to address the legislative body directly pursuant to Section 54954.3 at each teleconference location.

(4) For the purposes of this section, “teleconference” means a meeting of a legislative body, the members of which are in different locations, connected by electronic means, through either audio or video, or both. Nothing in this section shall prohibit a local agency from providing the public with additional teleconference locations.

(c) (1) No legislative body shall take action by secret ballot, whether preliminary or final.

(2) The legislative body of a local agency shall publicly report any action taken and the vote or abstention on that action of each member present for the action.

(3) Prior to taking final action, the legislative body shall orally report a summary of a recommendation for a final action on the salaries, salary schedules, or compensation paid in the form of fringe benefits of a local agency executive, as defined in subdivision (d) of Section 3511.1, during the open meeting in which the final action is to be taken. This paragraph shall not affect the public’s right under the California Public Records Act (Chapter 3.5 (commencing with Section 6250) of Division 7 of Title 1) to inspect or copy records created or received in the process of developing the recommendation.

(d) (1) Notwithstanding the provisions relating to a quorum in paragraph (3) of subdivision (b), if a health authority conducts a teleconference meeting, members who are outside the jurisdiction of the authority may be counted toward the establishment of a quorum when participating in the teleconference if at least 50

percent of the number of members that would establish a quorum are present within the boundaries of the territory over which the authority exercises jurisdiction, and the health authority provides a teleconference number, and associated access codes, if any, that allows any person to call in to participate in the meeting and the number and access codes are identified in the notice and agenda of the meeting.

(2) Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed as discouraging health authority members from regularly meeting at a common physical site within the jurisdiction of the authority or from using teleconference locations within or near the jurisdiction of the authority. A teleconference meeting for which a quorum is established pursuant to this subdivision shall be subject to all other requirements of this section.

(3) For purposes of this subdivision, a health authority means any entity created pursuant to Sections 14018.7, 14087.31, 14087.35, 14087.36, 14087.38, and 14087.9605 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, any joint powers authority created pursuant to Article 1 (commencing with Section 6500) of Chapter 5 of Division 7 for the purpose of contracting pursuant to Section 14087.3 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, and any advisory committee to a county-sponsored health plan licensed pursuant to Chapter 2.2 (commencing with Section 1340) of Division 2 of the Health and Safety Code if the advisory committee has 12 or more members.

(e) This section shall become operative January 1, 2024.

SEC. 5. Sections 3.1 and 4.1 of this bill incorporate amendments to Section 54953 of the Government Code proposed by both this bill and Assembly Bill 339. Those sections of this bill shall only become operative if (1) both bills are enacted and become effective on or before January 1, 2022, but this bill becomes operative first, (2) each bill amends Section 54953 of the Government Code, and (3) this bill is enacted after Assembly Bill 339, in which case Section 54953 of the Government Code, as amended by Sections 3 and 4 of this bill, shall remain operative only until the operative date of Assembly Bill 339, at which time Sections 3.1 and 4.1 of this bill shall become operative.

SEC. 6. It is the intent of the Legislature in enacting this act to improve and enhance public access to state and local agency meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic and future applicable

emergencies, by allowing broader access through teleconferencing options consistent with the Governor's Executive Order No. N-29-20 dated March 17, 2020, permitting expanded use of teleconferencing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

SEC. 7. The Legislature finds and declares that Sections 3 and 4 of this act, which amend, repeal, and add Section 54953 of the Government Code, further, within the meaning of paragraph (7) of subdivision (b) of Section 3 of Article I of the California Constitution, the purposes of that constitutional section as it relates to the right of public access to the meetings of local public bodies or the writings of local public officials and local agencies. Pursuant to paragraph (7) of subdivision (b) of Section 3 of Article I of the California Constitution, the Legislature makes the following findings:

This act is necessary to ensure minimum standards for public participation and notice requirements allowing for greater public participation in teleconference meetings during applicable emergencies.

SEC. 8. (a) The Legislature finds and declares that during the COVID-19 public health emergency, certain requirements of the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act (Article 9 (commencing with Section 11120) of Chapter 1 of Part 1 of Division 3 of Title 2 of the Government Code) were suspended by Executive Order N-29-20. Audio and video teleconference were widely used to conduct public meetings in lieu of physical location meetings, and public meetings conducted by teleconference during the COVID-19 public health emergency have been productive, have increased public participation by all members of the public regardless of their location in the state and ability to travel to physical meeting locations, have protected the health and safety of civil servants and the public, and have reduced travel costs incurred by members of state bodies and reduced work hours spent traveling to and from meetings.

(b) The Legislature finds and declares that Section 1 of this act, which adds and repeals Section 89305.6 of the Education Code, Section 2 of this act, which adds and repeals Section 11133 of the Government Code, and Sections 3 and 4 of this act, which amend, repeal, and add Section 54953 of the Government Code, all increase and potentially limit the public's right of access to the meetings of public bodies or the writings of public officials and agencies

within the meaning of Section 3 of Article I of the California Constitution. Pursuant to that constitutional provision, the Legislature makes the following findings to demonstrate the interest protected by this limitation and the need for protecting that interest:

(1) By removing the requirement that public meetings be conducted at a primary physical location with a quorum of members present, this act protects the health and safety of civil servants and the public and does not preference the experience of members of the public who might be able to attend a meeting in a physical location over members of the public who cannot travel or attend that meeting in a physical location.

(2) By removing the requirement for agendas to be placed at the location of each public official participating in a public meeting remotely, including from the member's private home or hotel room, this act protects the personal, private information of public officials and their families while preserving the public's right to access information concerning the conduct of the people's business.

SEC. 9. This act is an urgency statute necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety within the meaning of Article IV of the California Constitution and shall go into immediate effect. The facts constituting the necessity are:

In order to ensure that state and local agencies can continue holding public meetings while providing essential services like water, power, and fire protection to their constituents during public health, wildfire, or other states of emergencies, it is necessary that this act take effect immediately.

Approved _____, 2021

Governor

THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 361
Author: Robert Rivas (D)
Amended: 9/3/21 in Senate
Vote: 27 - Urgency

SENATE GOVERNANCE & FIN. COMMITTEE: 5-0, 7/1/21
AYES: McGuire, Nielsen, Durazo, Hertzberg, Wiener

SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE: 10-0, 7/13/21
AYES: Umberg, Borgeas, Caballero, Durazo, Gonzalez, Hertzberg, Jones, Laird,
Skinner, Wieckowski
NO VOTE RECORDED: Stern

SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE: 9-1, 9/9/21 (Pursuant to Senate Rule
29.10)
AYES: Umberg, Borgeas, Caballero, Durazo, Gonzalez, Hertzberg, Laird,
Wieckowski, Wiener
NOES: Jones
NO VOTE RECORDED: Stern

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: Senate Rule 28.8

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 62-4, 5/17/21 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Open meetings: state and local agencies: teleconferences

SOURCE: California Special Districts Association

DIGEST: This bill creates, until January 1, 2024, an exemption to teleconferenced public meeting requirements for local legislative bodies during states of emergency, as specified; and, until January 31, 2022, a similar exemption to teleconferenced public meeting requirements for certain state bodies, as specified.

Senate Floor Amendments of 9/3/21 add chaptering amendments to resolve conflicts with AB 339; add remote meeting provisions to the Bagley-Keene Open Meetings Act (Bagley-Keene Act) and the Gloria Romero Open Meetings Act of 2000 (Gloria Romero Act) that will sunset January 31, 2022; and add legislative findings related to the need for the bill's limitations on the public right of access to state and local public meetings.

Senate Floor Amendments of 8/30/21 add an urgency clause and address chaptering issues.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Affirms that the people have the right of access to information concerning the conduct of the people's business, and, therefore, the meetings of public bodies and the writings of public officials and agencies shall be open to public scrutiny. (Cal. Const., art. I, § 3(b)(1).)
- 2) Establishes the Gloria Romero Act, which requires a legislative body of a student body organization within the California State University system to conduct its business in open public meeting, except as provided by the Act, and establishes requirements and procedures for such meetings. (Ed. Code, tit. 3, div. 8, pt. 55, ch. 3, art. 1.5, §§ 89305 et seq.)
- 3) Authorizes bodies subject to the Gloria Romero Act to provide a teleconferencing option—which may be via audio or audiovisual means—for its meetings for the benefit of the public, subject to the following relevant requirements:
 - a) A majority of the membership of the legislative body must be at one meeting location.
 - b) The legislative body must post agendas at all teleconference locations.
 - c) Each teleconference location must be identified in the notice and agenda of the meeting or proceeding.
 - d) Each teleconference location must be accessible to the public.
 - e) The agenda must provide an opportunity for members of the public to address the legislative body at each teleconference location. (Ed. Code, § 89305(b)(1) & (2), (c).)

- 4) Establishes the Bagley-Keene Act, which requires state bodies to conduct their business in open public meetings, except as provided by the Act, and establishes requirements and procedures for such meetings. (Gov. Code, tit. 2, div. 3, art. 9, §§ 11120 et seq.)
 - a) “State bodies” covered by the Bagley-Keene Act include every state board, commission or body created by statute or required by law to conduct official meetings, every commission created by executive order, any board or body exercising the authority of a state body by delegation, any advisory body created by formal action of a state body, any body supported by public funds and which a member of a state body serves in their official capacity, and the State Bar of California. (Gov. Code, § 11121.)
 - b) “State bodies” do not include specified legislative agencies (except the State Bar of California), agencies subject to the Brown Act, and certain educational and health-related agencies. (Gov. Code, § 11121.1.)
- 5) Authorizes state bodies subject to the Bagley-Keene Act to provide a teleconferencing option—which may be via audio or audiovisual means—for its meetings for the benefit of the public, subject to the following relevant requirements:
 - a) The meeting must be audible to the public at the location specified in the notice of the meeting.
 - b) The legislative body must post agendas at all teleconference locations.
 - c) Each teleconference location must be identified in the notice and agenda of the meeting or proceeding.
 - d) Each teleconference location must be accessible to the public.
 - e) The agenda must provide an opportunity for members of the public to address the legislative body at each teleconference location.
 - f) All votes must be taken via rollcall.
 - g) At least one member of the state body must be physically present at the location specified in the notice of the meeting. (Gov. Code, § 11123.)
- 6) Establishes the Brown Act, which secures public access to the meetings of public commissions, boards, councils, and agencies in the state. (Gov. Code,

tit. 5, div. 2, pt. 1, ch. 9, §§ 54950 et seq.) The Brown Act defines the following relevant terms:

- a) A “local agency” is a county, city, whether general law or chartered, city and county, town, school district, municipal corporation, district, political subdivision, or any board, commission, or agency thereof, or any other local public agency. (Gov. Code, § 54951.)
 - b) A “legislative body” is the governing board of a local agency or any other local body created by state or federal statute; a commission, committee, board, or other body of a local agency, as specified; a board, commission, or other multimember body that governs a private corporation, limited liability company, or other entity that is either created by an elected legislative body to exercise delegated authority or receives funds from a local agency and includes a member of the legislative body of the local agency; or the lessee of any hospital leased pursuant to Health and Safety Code section 21131, where the lessee exercises any material authority delegated by the legislative body. (Gov. Code, § 54952.)
- 7) Requires all meetings of the legislative body of a local agency to be open and public, and all persons shall be permitted to attend any meeting of the legislative body of a local agency, except as otherwise provided in the Brown Act. (Gov. Code, § 54953.)
- 8) Authorizes the legislative body of a local agency to use teleconferencing for the benefit of the public and the legislative body of a local agency in connection with any meeting or proceeding authorized by law, provided that the teleconferenced meeting complies with all of the following conditions and all otherwise applicable laws:
- a) Teleconferencing, as authorized, may be used for all purposes in connection with any meeting within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body. All votes taken during a teleconferenced meeting shall be by rollcall. (Gov. Code, § 54953(b)(2).)
 - b) If the legislative body elects to use teleconferencing, it must post agendas at all teleconference locations and conduct teleconference meetings in a manner that protects the statutory and constitutional rights of the parties or in the public appearing before the legislative body of the local agency. (Gov. Code, § 54953(b)(3).)

- c) Each teleconferencing location shall be identified in the notice and agenda of the meeting or proceeding, and each teleconference location shall be accessible to the public. (Gov. Code, § 54953(b)(3).)
- d) During the teleconference, at least a quorum of the members of the legislative body shall participate from locations within the boundaries of the territory over which the local agency exercised jurisdiction, except as provided in 6). (Gov. Code, § 54953(b)(3).)
- e) The agenda shall provide an opportunity for members of the public to address the legislative body directly, as the Brown Act requires for in-person meetings, at each teleconference location. (Gov. Code, § 54953(b)(3).)
- f) For purposes of these requirements, “teleconference” means a meeting of a legislative body, the members of which are in different locations, connected by electronic means, through either audio or video, or both. (Gov. Code, § 54953(b)(4).)

Existing executive orders:

- 1) Proclaim a State of Emergency to exist in California as a result of the threat of COVID-19. (Governor’s Proclamation of a State of Emergency (Mar. 4, 2020).)
- 2) Provide that, notwithstanding any provision of state or local law, including the Bagley-Keene Act or the Brown Act, a local or state legislative body may, subject to the notice and accessibility requirements set forth in item 4), may hold public meetings via teleconferencing and make public meetings accessible telephonically or otherwise electronically to all members of the public seeking to observe and to address the local legislative body. (Governor’s Exec. Order No. N-25-20 (Mar. 12, 2020); Governor’s Exec. Order No. N-29-20 (Mar. 17, 2020); Governor’s Exec. Order No. N-08-21 (Jun. 11, 2021).)
- 3) Waive the requirements in the Bagley-Keene Act and the Brown Act expressly or impliedly requiring the physical presence of the members, the clerk, or other personnel of the body, or the public, as a condition of participation in, or quorum for, a public meeting, including:
 - a) The requirement that state and local bodies notice each teleconference location from which a member will be participating in a public meeting.

- b) The requirement that each teleconference location be accessible to the public.
 - c) The requirement that members of the public may address the body at each teleconference location.
 - d) The requirement that state and local bodies post agendas at all teleconference locations.
 - e) The requirement that, during teleconference meetings, at least a quorum of the members of the local body participate from locations within the boundaries of the territory over which the local body exercises jurisdiction. (Governor's Exec. Order No. N-25-20 (Mar. 12, 2020); Governor's Exec. Order No. N-29-20 (Mar. 17, 2020); Governor's Exec. Order No. N-08-21 (Jun. 11, 2021).)
- 4) Authorize a state or local legislative body to hold a meeting via teleconference, in which members of the public may observe and address the meeting through telephonic or other electronic means, subject to the below requirements, without having to make available any physical location from which the public may observe the meeting and offer comment:
- a) Implement a procedure for receiving and swiftly resolving requests for reasonable modification or accommodation from individuals with disabilities, consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq.) (ADA) and resolving any doubt whatsoever in favor of accessibility; this procedure must be advertised each time notice is given of the means by which members of the public may observe the meeting and offer public comment, pursuant to the notice requirements below.
 - b) Give advance notice of the time of, and post the agenda for, each public meeting according to the timeframes otherwise prescribed by the Brown Act, and using the means otherwise prescribed by the Brown Act.
 - c) In each instance in which notice of the time of the meeting is otherwise given or the agenda for the meeting is otherwise posted, also give notice of the means by which members of the public may observe the meeting and offer public comment. In any instance where there is a change in such means of public observation and comment, a body may satisfy this requirement by advertising such means using the most rapid means of communication available at the time within the meaning of the Bagley-Keene or Brown Act, which may include posting such means on the body's

website. (Governor's Exec. Order No. N-25-20 (Mar. 12, 2020); Governor's Exec. Order No. N-29-20 (Mar. 17, 2020); Governor's Exec. Order No. N-08-21 (Jun. 11, 2021).)

- 5) Urge state and local bodies to use sound discretion and to make reasonable efforts to adhere as closely as possible to the provisions of the Bagley-Keene Act and the Brown Act, and other applicable local laws regarding the conduct of public meetings, to maximize transparency and provide the public access to their meetings. (Governor's Exec. Order No. N-29-20 (Mar. 17, 2020).)
- 6) Provide that the above provisions will remain in effect until September 30, 2021. (Governor's Exec. Order No. N-08-21 (Jun. 11, 2021).)

This bill:

- 1) Suspends, for meetings subject to the Bagley-Keene Act and/or Gloria Romero Act, the following teleconferencing requirements, subject to compliance with item 2), until January 31, 2022:
 - a) Identifying, in the notice of the meeting, each teleconference location from which a member will be participating.
 - b) Making each teleconference location accessible to the public.
 - c) Allowing members of the public to address the body at each teleconference location.
 - d) Posting agendas at all teleconference locations.
 - e) Requiring at least one member of the body to be physically present at each location.
 - f) Requiring a physical location for the meeting for members of the public to observe the meeting and offer public comment.
- 2) Requires a state or student body holding a teleconferenced meeting under the suspended teleconferencing requirements to do all of the following:
 - a) Allow members of the public to observe and address the meeting telephonically or otherwise electronically, consistent with notice and accessibility requirements.
 - b) Implement a procedure for receiving and swiftly resolving requests for reasonable modification or accommodation from individuals with

disabilities, consistent with the ADA, with all doubts resolved in favor of accessibility.

- c) Advertise the procedure for such requests each time notice is given of the means by which the public may observe the meeting and offer public comment.
 - d) Give advance notice of the time of, and post the agenda for, each public meeting according to the timeframes and means otherwise required by the Bagley-Keene Act or Gloria Romero Act.
 - e) In each instance where the notice of the meeting is given or the agenda is posted, also give notice of the means by which members of the public may observe the meeting and offer public comment. In any instance where there is a change in the means of public observation or comment, or where the required information was not provided prior to the implementation date of the bill, the body may satisfy the requirement by advertising the means of public observation and comment using the most rapid means of communication available at the time, which may include posting the means on the body's website.
 - f) Use sound discretion to make reasonable efforts to adhere as closely as reasonably possible to the otherwise-applicable provisions of the Bagley-Keene act or Gloria Romero Act to maximize transparency and provide the public access to legislative body meetings.
- 3) Includes a sunset provision that will repeal items 1) to 2) on January 31, 2022.
- 4) Creates statutory exemptions to the Brown Act's teleconferencing requirements during a state or local emergency, as detailed below, until January 1, 2024.
- 5) Authorizes a local agency to use teleconferencing for a public meeting without complying with the Brown Act's teleconferencing quorum, meeting notice, and agenda requirements set forth in Government Code Section 54953(b)(3), in any of the following circumstances:
- a) The legislative body holds a meeting during a proclaimed state of emergency, and state or local officials have imposed or recommended measures to promote social distancing.
 - b) The legislative body holds a meeting during a proclaimed state of emergency for purposes of determining, by majority vote, whether as a

result of the emergency, meeting in person would present imminent risks to the health and safety of attendees.

- c) The legislative body holds a meeting during a proclaimed state of emergency and has determined by majority vote pursuant to b) above that, as a result of the emergency, meeting in person would present imminent risks to the health or safety of attendees.
- 6) Provides that a legislative body holding a teleconferenced meeting pursuant to the Brown Act exception provided in 5) is subject to the following requirements:
- a) The legislative body must give notice of the meeting and post agendas as otherwise required by the Brown Act.
 - b) The legislative body must allow members of the public to access the meeting, and the agenda must provide an opportunity for members of the public to address the legislative body directly pursuant to Brown Act requirements. In each instance where notice of the time of the teleconferenced meeting is otherwise given or the agenda for the meeting is otherwise posted, the legislative body must also give notice of the means by which members of the public may access the meeting and offer public comment. The agenda must identify and include an opportunity for all persons to attend via call-in option or an internet-based service option. The legislative body need not provide a physical location from which the public may attend or comment.
 - c) The legislative body must conduct teleconference meetings in a manner that protects the statutory and constitutional rights of the parties and the public appearing before the legislative body.
 - d) In the event of a disruption that prevents the public agency from broadcasting the meeting to members of the public using the call-in or internet-based service options, or in the event of a disruption within the local agency's control that prevents members of the public from offering public comments using the call-in or internet-based service options, the legislative body must take no further action on items appearing on the meeting agenda until public access to the meeting is restored. Actions taken on agenda items during a disruption preventing the broadcast of the meeting may be challenged as provided in the Brown Act.

- e) The legislative body may not require public comments to be submitted in advance of the meeting, and it must provide an opportunity for the public to address the legislative body and offer comment in real time.
 - f) The legislative body may use an online third-party system for individuals to provide public comment that requires an individual to register with the system prior to providing comment.
 - g) If a legislative body provides a timed public comment period, it may not close the comment period or the time to register to provide comment under f) until the timed period has elapsed. If the legislative body does not provide a time-limited comment period, it must allow a reasonable time for the public to comment on each agenda item and to register as necessary under f).
- 7) Provides that if the state of emergency remains active, or state or local officials have imposed measures to promote social distancing, the legislative body must, in order to continue meeting subject to this exemption to the Brown Act, no later than 30 days after it commences using the exemption, and every 30 days thereafter, make the following findings by majority vote:
- a) The legislative body has reconsidered the circumstances of the state of emergency; and
 - b) Either (i) the state of emergency continues to directly impact the ability of the members to meet safely in person; or (ii) state or local officials continue to impose or recommend measures to promote social distancing.
- 8) Defines, for items 4) to 7), “state of emergency” as a state of emergency proclaimed pursuant to Government Code Section 8625.
- 9) Provides that the provisions relating to the Brown Act will remain in effect only until January 1, 2024, and as of that date be repealed.
- 10) Makes findings and declarations relating to this bill’s intent to increase public participation in, and possible limitation of public access to, public meetings during states of emergency as a result of this bill’s telephonic meeting provisions.
- 11) Includes an urgency clause, so this bill will take effect immediately.

Comments

According to the author:

When the COVID-19 pandemic started, public agencies struggled to conduct their meetings in compliance with the public accessibility and transparency requirements of the Brown Act and Bagley-Keene Acts while still abiding by stay-at-home orders. As a result, Governor Newsom issued several executive orders (EOs) to grant agencies the flexibility to meet remotely during the pandemic. However, these EOs are expiring soon, meaning that these flexibilities will not apply to future emergencies like wildfires, floods, pandemics, or other events that make in-person gatherings dangerous. Local and state agencies will again struggle to provide essential services like water, power, and fire protection at a time when constituents will need those services the most.

AB 361 will guarantee that local and state bodies can meet the needs of the communities they serve by allowing them to temporarily hold meetings remotely. This bill will also require the opportunity for public to join via telephone or video conference to ensure that all members of the public can participate safely.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

SUPPORT: (Verified 9/9/21)

California Special Districts Association (source)
Alameda County Mosquito Abatement District
Association of California Healthcare Districts
Association of California Water Agencies
Association of Environmental Professionals
Cal Voices
California Association of Joint Powers Authorities
California Association of Local Agency Formation Commissions
California Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency
California Department of Tax and Fee Administration Director Nicholas Maduro
California Downtown Association
California Municipal Utilities Association
California State Association of Counties
California State Association of Electrical Workers
California State University, Office of the Chancellor
California Travel Association

Cameron Estates Community Services District
Cameron Park Community Services District
Cities Agoura, Alameda, Brentwood, Carlsbad, Clayton, Encinitas, Foster City,
Fremont, Hidden Hills, Lafayette, Lawndale, Martinez, Menifee, Norwalk,
Redwood City, Riverside, San Pablo, Soledad, Walnut Creek, and Woodland
Coachella Valley Mosquito and Vector Control District
Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors
Costa Mesa Sanitary District
County of Monterey
County of Santa Clara
Cucamonga Valley Water District
Department of General Services
Disability Rights California
Eastern Municipal Water District
Ebbetts Pass Fire District
Eden Township Healthcare District dba Eden Health District
El Dorado Hills Community Services District
Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District
Fallbrook Regional Health District
Fresno Mosquito and Vector Control District
Gilroy City Councilmember Zach Hilton
Grizzly Flats Community Services District
Honey Lake Valley Resource Conservation District
Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District
Humboldt Community Services District
Jackson Valley Irrigation District
Kayes Community Service District
Kinneloa Irrigation District
Las Virgenes – Malibu Council of Governments
League of California Cities
Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts
Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti
Mammoth Community Water District
Mesa Water District
Metropolitan Water District of Southern California
Mountain Counties Water Resources Association
Mt. View Sanitary District
Murphys Fire Protection District
Napa County Regional Park and Open Space District
North County Fire Protection District

North Tahoe Fire Protection District
Oleventhain Municipal Water District
Orange County Employees Association
Orange County Local Agency Formation Commission
Orange County Water District
Palmdale Water District
Palos Verdes Library District
Reclamation District No. 1000
Rural County Representatives of California
Sacramento Suburban Water District
San Diego County Water Authority
Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
Saratoga Fire District
South Coast Air Quality Management District
Southern California Regional Rail Authority
Southern California Water Coalition
Stege Sanitary District
Tahoe Resource Conservation District
Templeton Community Services District
Three Valleys Municipal Water District
Town of Discovery Bay
Truckee Fire Protection District
Urban Counties of California
Valley-Wide Recreation and Park District
Vista Fire Protection District
Vista Irrigation District
Water Replenishment District of Southern California
Western Municipal Water District
Yolanda Richardson, Secretary, California Government Operations Agency

OPPOSITION: (Verified 9/9/21)

ACLU California Action
ACT for Women and Girls
California Environmental Justice Alliance
Californians Aware
First Amendment Coalition
Howard Jarvis Taxpayers association
Together We Will/Indivisible – Los Gatos

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: According to a coalition of supporters, including bill sponsor California Special Districts Association:

AB 361 would codify portions of the Governor of California's Executive Orders ("the Orders") from March 2020 relating to the Ralph M. Brown Act ("the Brown Act"), which made it safe for local agencies to meet. The Orders limited their operation to the time period during which state or local public health officials have imposed or recommended social distancing measures. In similar fashion, the provisions of this bill are operative only in circumstances when it is unsafe for the members of the legislative body of the local agency to meet in person. The bill's provisions are only able to be utilized pursuant to a formal state of emergency, and the declared emergency must directly threaten the safety of the agency members, staff, or the public. By establishing such an extraordinarily high standard for agencies to meet remotely, this bill avoids creating a "one-size-fits-all" approach that would otherwise apply in all future emergencies. An agency would not be able to rely upon these provisions to meet remotely if the emergency does not pose a threat to the agency.

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION: According to a coalition of the bill's opponents:

We appreciate that under circumstances like the recent public health emergency accommodations may temporarily be needed to allow local governments to conduct necessary business. Nevertheless, deleting fundamental and longstanding public protections should be extremely rare and highly circumscribed. Unfortunately, AB 361 goes too far by exempting local governments from simple and important obligations to identify the location of each teleconference location, to make the teleconference locations accessible to the public, and to require that a quorum participate within the geographic boundaries of the body's jurisdiction. Moreover, the conditions under which these obligations would be canceled are far too lax.

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 62-4, 5/17/21

AYES: Aguiar-Curry, Arambula, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Bloom, Boerner Horvath, Burke, Carrillo, Cervantes, Chau, Chiu, Choi, Cooley, Cooper, Cunningham, Daly, Frazier, Friedman, Gallagher, Cristina Garcia, Eduardo Garcia, Gipson, Lorena Gonzalez, Grayson, Holden, Irwin, Jones-Sawyer, Kiley, Lackey, Lee, Levine, Low, Maienschein, Mathis, McCarty, Medina, Mullin, Muratsuchi, Nazarian, O'Donnell, Petrie-Norris, Quirk, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Reyes, Luz Rivas, Robert Rivas, Rodriguez, Blanca Rubio, Salas,

Santiago, Seyarto, Stone, Ting, Villapudua, Voepel, Waldron, Ward, Akilah
Weber, Wicks, Rendon

NOES: Bigelow, Megan Dahle, Davies, Nguyen

NO VOTE RECORDED: Calderon, Chen, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gray, Kalra,
Mayes, Patterson, Smith, Valladares, Wood

Prepared by: Allison Meredith / JUD. / (916) 651-4113
9/9/21 20:31:02

**** END ****

