

Temporary Modification of Massachusetts Opening Meeting Law (3/12/20)

Purpose:

On March 12th, 2020 the Baker-Polito Administration announced an emergency order temporarily modifying the state's open meeting law in order to allow state, quasi, and local governments to continue to carry out essential functions and operations during the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak. The intent of this order is for Massachusetts residents to take extra measures to put distance between themselves and other people to further reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

This order will remain in place until rescinded *or* the State of Emergency is terminated.

Overview of the Emergency Order:

- This order applies to meetings of public bodies including commissions, boards, and committees that engage in policy making at the state, quasi, and local level and does not apply to Town meetings or judicial and quasi-judicial hearings.

- The requirement for a **physical location** of a public meeting has been suspended, provided there are means of access available. These means must be offered without subscription, toll, or similar charge to the public. These means include:

- Phone conferencing line for members of the public
- Social media or other internet streaming services
- Online meeting services

- A municipal body that for reasons of economic hardship and despite best efforts is unable to provide alternate means of public access may instead post on its municipal website a full and complete transcript, recording, or other comprehensive record of the proceedings as soon as practicable upon conclusion of the proceedings. This does not apply to proceedings that are conducted pursuant to a general or special law or regulation, or a local ordinance or by-law, that requires allowance for active participation by members of the public.

- The order relieves the requirement that a **quorum** of members be physically present at the public meeting. During this period, members may all participate by remote or virtual means.