



May 26, 2022

**MAYOR &
CITY COUNCIL**

Judy Ritter
Mayor

John B. Franklin
Deputy Mayor

Joe Green
Councilmember

Corinna Contreras
Councilmember

Katie Melendez
Councilmember

CITY MANAGER

Patrick Johnson

The Honorable Alex Lee
California State Assembly
State Capitol – Room 2170
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0025
assemblymember.lee@assembly.ca.gov

The Honorable Cristina Garcia
California State Assembly
State Capitol
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249-0058
assemblymember.garcia@assembly.ca.gov

**RE: AB 1944 (Lee and Garcia) Local government: open and public meetings
(As Amended May 25, 2022) – Notice of Support**

Dear Assembly Member Lee and Assembly Member Garcia:

On behalf of the City of Vista, we write to express our support for AB 1944, a measure that would authorize members of local legislative bodies to teleconference from a remote location without making the address of that location public. Additionally, the bill requires that – for those local agencies that elect to use teleconferencing for its legislative body meetings – a video stream is made available to members of the public, including an opportunity to provide public comment via call-in or audio-visual option. AB 1944 represents an important modernization to the Brown Act that protects local elected officials' location when participating from a non-public, remote location, while improving access to members of the public via a teleconferencing option.

Since Governor Newsom's Executive Order N-25-20 on March 12, 2020, the City of Vista, and other local agencies subject to the Brown Act were able to utilize remote participation for elected officials and for the public during the COVID-19 public health crisis. Generally, those processes worked well, allowing for local agencies to continue to conduct the public's business in a safe manner.

While authority to maintain remote participation continues after the approval of last year's AB 361 (R.Rivas), based on public health recommendations at the time, this authorization of remote participation by local elected officials, as well as members of the public, is slated to sunset at the end of 2023. Developing a long-term framework for remote participation is a critical update of the Brown Act. We have learned during the pandemic that such participation is effective, transparent, and encourages participation

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from a broader component of the public than was anticipated. Utilizing teleconferencing services increases transparency and accessibility for open and public meetings, and the ability to continue to utilize these options is beneficial and convenient to the community. The City has seen an increase in public participation during meetings because of virtual participation options and allows the public to participate from a convenient location, typically in the comfort of their own home. These positive effects on the conduct of the public's business would suggest that the conditions outlined in AB 1944 are both reasonable and appropriate to incorporate into our post-pandemic practice of delivering open and public meetings.

Looking to the future, with the lifting of the Executive Order and/or expiration of AB 361 (Statutes of 2021), the City Council looks forward to the ability to continue this model without the current Brown Act requirement that telecommunications locations be noticed and accessible to the public. AB 1944 successfully modernizes existing law to align with the technological capacities of telecommunications software, providing public access while also protecting the safety of councilmembers participating remotely. The City is supportive of policies that allow for the continued use of teleconferencing platforms to continue holding hybrid public meetings outside of a declared state of emergency.

For these reasons, the City of Vista supports AB 1944.

For questions or to coordinate a further discussion, please contact Imelda M. Huerta, Assistant to the City Manager at (760) 643-5208 or ihuerta@cityofvista.com. Thank you for considering our request and for the continued partnership.

Sincerely,



Judy Ritter
Mayor

cc: The Honorable Alex Lee, allison.lim@asm.ca.gov; aubrey.rodriguez@asm.ca.gov
The Honorable Christina Garcia, ashley.labar@asm.ca.gov;
lamont.gordon@asm.ca.gov
Office of Senator Pat Bates, cynthia.bryant@sen.ca.gov
Office of Assembly Member Tasha Boerner Horvath, celia.mata@asm.ca.gov
Catherine Hill, League of California Cities, chill@calcities.org
League of California Cities, cityletters@calcities.org