

Policy Regarding Remote Participation by Committee Members in Public Committee and Board Meetings

Background

The Massachusetts AG's Office allows for the remote participation by members of the town's public committees and boards after a formal vote by the town's Board of Selectmen authorizing such remote participation, and subject to such policies as the Board of Selectmen establish to govern how committees and boards should go about taking advantage of this option. On numerous occasions over the recent past, Medfield committees and boards have been faced with holding meetings that one or more of their members cannot attend in person. This policy document is intended to establish the procedures by which a Medfield committee or board can provide for the remote participation of one or more of its members in a publicly announced meeting.

Applicability

This policy statement applies to all members of committees and boards, to include committee/board chairs. It does not, however, apply to the committee or board member responsible for taking minutes at a committee meeting. Policy provisions related to voting procedures only apply to voting members of the committee or board. Member(s) of a public body must be physically present and may not utilize remote participation for adjudicatory hearings.

Conditions for Authorizing the Remote Participation of Committee or Board Members in Meetings

- The decision to allow committee or board members to join a meeting remotely rests with the committee or board chair. In so authorizing this remote participation, the chair must ensure that a quorum of the committee's or board's voting members will be physically present at the meeting.
- Remote participants in a meeting may join the meeting by telephone, video conference, or other comparable communication channel. At a minimum, remote participants must have a clear audio channel that enables them to both hear the members of the committee or board who are physically present at the meeting, and to be heard by those members when the remote participants are speaking. In cases where the meeting is being held in a large venue, particularly one where members of the public are present at the meeting, the communications equipment must be capable of ensuring that the remotely joining member(s) can be heard by everyone in attendance at the meeting.

- Any votes taken during the meeting that involve participation by remote committee members must be roll call votes, in accordance with the requirements of the State AG's Office.
- No member of a committee will be allowed to join committee meetings remotely more than 25% of the time (1 out of 4 meetings). This provision must be met from the 4th meeting of the committee on (i.e., a member can only remotely participate in one of the first four meetings of the committee or board).