



Re: SF 4461 (Open Meeting Law – Expanding Remote Participation)

Dear Chair Dziedzic and Members of the State & Local Government Committee:

I write as executive director of the Minnesota Newspaper Association (MNA), to express concerns we have about SF 4451. MNA represents more than 260 newspapers throughout the state, from the smallest to the largest.

SF 4451 would authorize a dramatic expansion in the ability of public officials to participate remotely in meetings of government bodies. Indeed, as the bill summary states, it would modify the open meeting law to allow “unlimited remote participation.” We can appreciate a desire to modernize the Open Meeting Law statute to reflect how our government and society function today, but this proposal goes too far in one direction.

While this change would not directly affect access by the general public or the news media to government meetings, it would mean that members of government bodies would virtually never be required to attend meetings in person. They could therefore avoid most personal interaction with their constituents and news media. They could avoid having to directly address those constituents collectively in public meetings, which provide a unique environment for conveying community concerns on important community issues.

Furthermore, because the members of public bodies could participate remotely from anywhere, they would not need to be physically present in their localities for weeks or even months at a time, further separating them from their constituents and the concerns they might have.

For these reasons, it is difficult for us to see how this proposal is good for popular government and for the democratic process. MNA would prefer to see a full review of the current law by lawmakers and stakeholders to determine how the law could best be updated while still maintaining a balance between flexibility and public access.

We appreciate your consideration of our concerns.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa Hills". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lisa" and last name "Hills" clearly distinguishable.

Lisa Hills
Executive Director
Minnesota Newspaper Association