

OPEN MEETINGS ACT CHANGES

SPECIFIC TO THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

COMPILED BY THE OHIO TOWNSHIP ASSOCIATION | 3/25/20

The Generally Assembly recently made changes to Ohio's Open Meetings Act in response to the COVID-19 outbreak (HB 197). **It is important to note that these changes are temporary, in effect from now until the end of the Governor's declared state of emergency or December 1, 2020 (whichever comes first).**

Generally, the bill allows public bodies to conduct meetings and hearings electronically during this state of emergency, provided certain stipulations are met:

1. Providing Notice:

Public bodies must continue to provide notice to the public of their meetings. Public bodies must notify the public, the media that have requested notification, and parties required to be notified of a hearing at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting or hearing by reasonable methods, allowing a person to determine the time, location, and manner by which the meeting or hearing will be conducted. In the event of an emergency requiring immediate official action, the public body shall make these notifications immediately.

2. Public Access:

Public bodies must provide public access to any meeting or hearing that the public would otherwise be entitled to attend. The public body must ensure that the public can observe and hear the discussions of all members, whether they are participating in person or electronically.

For hearings, public bodies must establish a means, through the use of electronic equipment widely available to the general public, to converse with witnesses and receive documentary testimony and physical evidence.

Public bodies may meet by:

- Teleconference;
- Video conference; and
- Other electronic technologies.

Teleconference and video conference options available to townships include FreeConferenceCall, GoToMeeting, Zoom, Facebook Live, GoogleMeets, Skype, Webex, AnyMeeting, JoinMe, and eztalks.

**Note: This list is not exhaustive, and the OTA does not endorse any particular product.*

The public can be provided access through live-streaming, local radio, television, cable, or public access channels, call in information for a teleconference, or by other similar electronic means.

All actions taken through an electronic meeting during this time have the same effect as if they were conducted during an in-person meeting.

Questions on the Open Meetings Act? Please consult your county prosecutor or legal counsel.



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