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New Brown Act Provisions Allow Additional Process for Remote Meeting Attendance

AB 2449 amends the Brown Act to provide an additional procedure for members of legislative bodies to attend public meetings remotely. It will become effective on January 1, 2023.

Under this new law, members of a legislative body may attend public meetings remotely without identifying their teleconference site on the agency's agenda or ensuring it is accessible to the public if the procedures below are followed.

As long as a quorum of the legislative body participates in person from a physical location open to the public, the remaining agency members can participate remotely in two situations:

1. Just Cause

Just cause is defined as any one of the following:

- childcare or caregiving of a child, parent, grandparent, grandchild, sibling, spouse, or domestic partner that requires a member to participate remotely;
- a contagious illness that prevents a member from attending in person;
- a need related to a physical or mental disability; or
- travel while on business of the legislative body or another state or local agency.

In order to participate remotely under the *just cause* provisions, the member must notify the legislative body at the earliest possible opportunity, including at the start of a meeting, of their need to participate remotely and provide a general description of the circumstances related to one of the four items above.

A member may only participate remotely under the *just cause* provisions up to two meetings per calendar year.

2. Emergency Circumstances

Emergency circumstances means a physical or family medical emergency that prevents a member from attending in person.

In order to participate remotely under the *emergency circumstances* provisions, the member must request that the legislative body allow them to participate in the meeting remotely because of emergency circumstances and the legislative body must take action to approve the request.

A member must make a request to participate remotely under the *emergency circumstances* provisions as soon as possible. The legislative body may take action on this request at the earliest opportunity. If the request does not allow sufficient time to place it on the agenda for the meeting for which the request is made, the legislative body may take action on the request at the beginning of the meeting by majority vote.

The legislative body must request a general description of the circumstances relating to the member's need to appear remotely. This description does not have to be more than 20 words and the member does not have to disclose any personal medical information.

Additional Rules if Members Participate Remotely

If agency members participate remotely under this new law for either the *just cause* or *emergency circumstances* situations described above then the following rules apply:

- The legislative body must provide a way for the public to remotely hear, visually observe, and remotely address the legislative body, either by a two-way audiovisual platform or a two-way telephonic service and a live webcasting of the meeting.
- The legislative body must provide notice of how the public can access the meeting and offer comments.
- The agenda must identify and include an opportunity for the public to attend and directly address the legislative body through a call-in option, an internet-based service option, and in-person at the location of the meeting.
- The body cannot require comments to be submitted before the start of the meeting. The public must be allowed to make "real time" public comment.
- If there is a disruption to the meeting broadcast or in the ability to take call-in or internet-based public comment, no further action can be taken on agenda items until the issue is resolved.
- The legislative body must implement a procedure for receiving and resolving requests for reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities, and must give notice of these procedures.
- Members participating remotely must participate through both audio and visual technology.

- Members participating remotely must publicly disclose at the meeting before any action is taken whether any other individuals 18 years of age or older are present in the room at the remote location with the member and the general nature of the member's relationship with the individual.
- A member may not participate in meetings solely by teleconference under this law for more than three consecutive months or 20% of the regular meetings for the public agency within a calendar year. If the legislative body regularly meets less than 10 times a year, a member may not participate remotely for more than two meetings.

Legislative bodies may still meet via teleconference by following the traditional Brown Act rules of identifying the teleconference site on the agency's agenda and ensuring it is accessible for the public to attend. Further, legislative bodies may meet by teleconference under AB 361 until January 1, 2024 during the Governor's proclaimed State of Emergency and as long as other requirements are met.