



April 9, 2020

The Honorable Ralph Northam
Governor of Virginia
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor Northam,

As we attend to the immediate and unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 emergency, it is also essential to ensure that operations can continue for the public good.

We seek a clarifying legislative fix through an amendment to HB29, the caboose budget, making it clear that all public bodies, including local and regional bodies, commissions, and authorities, are able to hold electronic meetings to discuss business necessary to continue operations, beyond just discussing the emergency. We believe this fix will confirm the Attorney General’s Opinion 20-011, requested by Delegate Sullivan and Senator McPike, stating that continuity of operations is allowed under the law. The amendment clarifies the full range of public bodies that are able to continue operations.

The proposed amendment is drawn narrowly to respond to this unusual health-related emergency and only for the duration of the Governor’s declared emergency. The health risks that accompany having an in-person quorum make this clarification particularly necessary with the recent extension of the stay at home order to June 10, 2020.

The change sought preserves all the current open government protections: a quorum is required, as are three days of advance notice to the public, information on how to access the electronic meeting, and arrangements for public access to the meetings. Copies of the agenda and meeting materials must be made available in electronic form, and minutes and votes must be recorded in a roll call fashion.

Public bodies will strive to have the people speaking be clearly identified. There will be staff and members available after the meeting to speak to the press when requested, and, to the extent practicable, videoconferencing methods will be used to hold meetings.

We are asking for your support of this requested amendment for the General Assembly to consider when it reconvenes. Please reach out if you have any questions or concerns.

Thanks you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Joseph Haggerty
President & CEO
Alexandria Chamber
of Commerce

Kate Bates
President & CEO
Arlington Chamber
of Commerce

Tony Howard
President & CEO
Loudoun County
Chamber of Commerce

Julie Coons
President & CEO
Northern Virginia
Chamber of Commerce

Deborah Jones
President & CEO
Prince William Chamber
of Commerce