

ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CONTROL APPEALS BOARD

STAFF REPORT

TELEPHONIC BOARD MEETING

June 2, 2023

SUBJECT:

Senate Bill 544 (Laird, 2023): Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act: teleconferencing

BACKGROUND:

Existing law, known as the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act, requires that all meetings of a state body be open and public, and all persons be permitted to attend any meeting of a state body, except as provided. Violation of the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act is a crime.

Current law permits members of a state body to participate remotely and, after July 1, 2023, will require each teleconference location to be identified in the notice and agenda of the meeting and requires each teleconference location to be accessible to the public.

ANALYSIS:

This bill amends Government Code § 11123 to remove certain teleconference requirements of the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act, including that each teleconference location be identified in a meeting notice and agenda and that each teleconference location be accessible to the public. Additionally, this bill requires state bodies to provide a means by which the public may remotely hear audio of the meeting, remotely observe the meeting, or attend the meeting. In addition, at least one member of the state body, or the state body's staff, must be physically present at the location specified in the notice of the meeting.

Since the start of the pandemic, the ABC Appeals Board has adapted to videoconference hearings and been pleased with the increased participation by the public, reductions in costs to the state and those who appear before the Board, and efficiencies that it has allowed. Allowing videoconference hearings saves the state and licensees money in travel costs and improves the accessibility and transparency of Board proceedings.

ATTACHMENTS:

Senate Bill 544 (Laird, 2023): Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act: teleconferencing
(as amended April 27, 2023)

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Vote to support SB 544

STAFF CONTACT:

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AMENDED IN SENATE APRIL 27, 2023

AMENDED IN SENATE MARCH 20, 2023

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE— 2023–2024 REGULAR SESSION

SENATE BILL

NO. 544

Introduced by Senator Laird

February 15, 2023

An act to amend Section 11123 of the Government Code, relating to state government.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 544, as amended, Laird. Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act: teleconferencing.

Existing law, the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act, requires, with specified exceptions, that all meetings of a state body be open and public and all persons be permitted to attend any meeting of a state body. The act authorizes meetings through teleconference subject to specified requirements, including, among others, that the state body post agendas at all teleconference locations, that each teleconference location be identified in the notice and agenda of the meeting or proceeding, that each teleconference location be accessible to the public, that the agenda provide an opportunity for members of the public to address the state body directly at each teleconference location, and that at least one member of the state body be physically present at the location specified in the notice of the meeting.

Existing law, until July 1, 2023, authorizes, subject to specified notice and accessibility requirements, a state body to hold public meetings through teleconferencing and suspends certain requirements of the act, including the above-described teleconference requirements.

This bill would amend existing law that will remain operative after July 1, 2023, to remove indefinitely the teleconference requirements that a state body post agendas at all teleconference locations, that each teleconference location be identified in the notice and agenda of the meeting or proceeding, and that each teleconference location be accessible to the public. The bill would require a state body to provide a means by which the public may remotely hear audio of the meeting, remotely observe the meeting, or attend the meeting by providing on the posted agenda a teleconference telephone number, an internet website or other online platform, and a physical address for at least one site, including, if available, access equivalent to the access for a member of the state body participating remotely. The bill would require any notice required by the act to specify the applicable teleconference telephone number, internet website or other online platform, and physical address indicating how the public can access the meeting remotely and in person. The bill would revise existing law to no longer require that members of the public have the opportunity to address the state body directly at each teleconference location, but would continue to require that the agenda provide an opportunity for members of the public to address the state body directly. The bill would require a member or staff to be physically present at the location specified in the notice of the meeting.

This bill would provide that it does not affect prescribed existing notice and agenda requirements and would require the state body to post an agenda on its internet website and, on the day of the meeting, at any physical meeting location designated in the notice of the meeting. The bill would prohibit the notice and agenda from disclosing information regarding any remote location from which a member is participating and define "remote location" for this purpose. The bill would provide that members of the public shall be entitled to exercise their right to directly address the state body during the teleconferenced meeting without being required to submit public comments prior to the meeting or in writing.

This bill would require a state body, upon discovering that a means of remote participation required by the bill has failed during a meeting and cannot be restored, to end or adjourn the meeting in accordance with prescribed adjournment and notice provisions, including information about reconvening.

This bill would require a state body that holds a meeting through teleconferencing pursuant to the bill and allows members of the public to observe and address the meeting telephonically or otherwise electronically to implement and advertise, as prescribed, a procedure for receiving and swiftly resolving requests for reasonable modification or accommodation from individuals with disabilities, consistent with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

This bill would require a member of a state body who attends a meeting by teleconference from a remote location to disclose 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 any such individuals.

Existing constitutional provisions require that a statute that limits the right of access to the meetings of public bodies or the writings of public officials and agencies be adopted with findings demonstrating the interest protected by the limitation and the need for protecting that interest.

This bill would make legislative findings to that effect.

DIGEST KEY

Vote: majority Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: no

BILL TEXT

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS
FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1.

Section 11123 of the Government Code is amended to read:

11123.

(a) All meetings of a state body shall be open and public and all persons shall be permitted to attend any meeting of a state body except as otherwise provided in this article.

(b) (1) This article does not prohibit a state body from holding an open or closed meeting by teleconference for the benefit of the public and state body. The meeting or proceeding held by teleconference shall otherwise comply with all applicable requirements or laws relating to a specific type of meeting or proceeding, including the following:

(A) The teleconferencing meeting shall comply with all requirements of this article applicable to other meetings.

(B) The portion of the teleconferenced meeting that is required to be open to the public shall be audible to the public at the location specified in the notice of the meeting.

(C) If the state body elects to conduct a meeting or proceeding by teleconference, it shall conduct teleconference meetings in a manner that protects the rights of any party or member of the public appearing before the state body. The state body shall provide a means by which the public may remotely hear audio of the meeting, remotely observe the meeting, or attend the meeting by providing on the posted agenda a teleconference telephone number, an internet website or other online platform, and a physical address for at least one site, including, if available, access equivalent to the access for a member of the state body participating remotely. The applicable teleconference telephone number, internet website or other online platform, and physical address indicating how the public can access the meeting remotely and in person shall be specified in any notice required by this article.

(D) The agenda shall provide an opportunity for members of the public to address the state body directly pursuant to Section 11125.7.

(E) All votes taken during a teleconferenced meeting shall be by rollcall.

(F) The portion of the teleconferenced meeting that is closed to the public may not include the consideration of any agenda item being heard pursuant to Section 11125.5.

(G) At least one member or staff of the state body shall be physically present at the location specified in the notice of the meeting.

(H) This section does not affect the requirement prescribed by this article that the state body post an agenda of a meeting in accordance with the applicable notice requirements of this article, including Section 11125, requiring the state body to post an agenda of a meeting at least 10 days in advance of the meeting, Section 11125.4, applicable to special meetings, and Sections 11125.5 and 11125.6, applicable to emergency meetings. The state body shall post the agenda on its internet website and, on the day of the meeting, at any physical meeting location designated in the notice of the meeting. The notice and agenda shall not disclose information regarding any remote location from which a member is participating.

(I) Members of the public shall be entitled to exercise their right to directly address the state body during the teleconferenced meeting without being required to submit public comments prior to the meeting or in writing.

(J) Upon discovering that a means of remote participation required by this section has failed during a meeting and cannot be restored, the state body shall end or adjourn the meeting in accordance with Section 11128.5. In addition to any other requirements that may apply, the state body shall provide notice of the meeting's end or adjournment on the state body's internet website and by email to any person who has requested notice of meetings of the state body by email under this article. If the meeting will be adjourned and reconvened on the same day, further notice shall be provided by an automated message on a telephone line posted on the state body's agenda, internet website, or by a similar means, that will communicate when the state body intends to reconvene the meeting and how a member of the public may hear audio of the meeting or observe the meeting.

(2) For the purposes of this subdivision, ~~“teleconference”~~ both of the following definitions shall apply:

(A) “Teleconference” means a meeting of a state body, the members of which are at different locations, connected by electronic means, through either audio or both audio and video. This section does not prohibit a state body from providing members of the public with additional locations in which the public may observe or address the state body by electronic means, through either audio or both audio and video.

(B) “Remote location” means a location from which a member of a state body participates in a meeting other than any physical meeting location designated in the notice of the meeting. Remote locations need not be accessible to the public.

(c) If a state body holds a meeting through teleconferencing pursuant to this section and allows members of the public to observe and address the meeting telephonically or otherwise electronically, the state body shall also do both of the following:

(1) Implement a procedure for receiving and swiftly resolving requests for reasonable modification or accommodation from individuals with disabilities, consistent with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. Sec. 12101 et seq.), and resolving any doubt whatsoever in favor of accessibility.

(2) Advertise that procedure each time notice is given of the means by which members of the public may observe the meeting and offer public comment.

(d) The state body shall publicly report any action taken and the vote or abstention on that action of each member present for the action.

(e) If a member of a state body attends a meeting by teleconference from a remote location, the member shall disclose 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 any such individuals.

~~(e)~~

(f) For purposes of this section, “participate remotely” means participation in a meeting at a location other than the physical location designated in the agenda of the meeting.

SEC. 2.

The Legislature finds and declares that Section 1 of this act, which amends Section 11123 of the Government Code, imposes a limitation on the public's right of access to the meetings of public bodies or the writings of public officials and agencies within the meaning of Section 3 of Article I of the

California Constitution. Pursuant to that constitutional provision, the Legislature makes the following findings to demonstrate the interest protected by this limitation and the need for protecting that interest:

(a) By removing the requirement for agendas to be placed at the location of each public official participating in a public meeting remotely, including from the member's private home or hotel room, this act protects the personal, private information of public officials and their families while preserving the public's right to access information concerning the conduct of the people's business.

(b) During the COVID-19 public health emergency, audio and video teleconference were widely used to conduct public meetings in lieu of physical location meetings, and those public meetings have been productive, increased public participation by all members of the public regardless of their location and ability to travel to physical meeting locations, increased the pool of people who are able to serve on these bodies, protected the health and safety of civil servants and the public, and have reduced travel costs incurred by members of state bodies and reduced work hours spent traveling to and from meetings.

(c) Conducting audio and video teleconference meetings enhances public participation and the public's right of access to meetings of the public bodies by improving access for individuals that often face barriers to physical attendance.