

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SANTA MONICA



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Re: City Council Agenda Item 4A

Dear Mayor Himmelrich, Mayor Pro Tem McCowan, and City Councilmembers,

The League of Women Voters of Santa Monica is a nonpartisan political organization which encourages informed and active participation in government. We appreciate the Council's efforts to explore options to allow for more robust and inclusive public input. As you continue to refine the policies for public meetings, we urge you to include options for remote public comment such as a call-in option, for all public meetings of the City Council and City Boards and Commissions.

Providing spoken public comment at City Council meetings, as well as Board and Commission meetings, is an important part of enabling active participation in government.

Unfortunately, the ability to provide spoken public comment has not always been accessible for all. When the COVID-19 pandemic began and all public meetings moved to remote meetings, a silver lining of this awful situation was greater accessibility for members of our community to provide feedback to our elected and appointed leaders.

When the Council returned to in-person meetings on April 12, 2022, without the option for remote verbal public comment, many constituents were once again limited in their opportunities to provide feedback in Council meetings. In-person meetings have always been inaccessible for some members of our community, and the pandemic has expanded the number of community members who are not able to attend in-person meetings. This includes people at higher risk of complications from COVID-19, people who serve as caretakers of children, partners, or other dependents, or any number of life situations that may restrict the ability of community members to attend in-person meetings to provide verbal public comment.

We acknowledge that all constituents also have the option to provide written public comments, such as this letter, and that all of these written public comments become part of the public record. However, there are limitations to written comments and allowing remote verbal public comment during City Council meetings is a vital part of not only enabling robust public participation in government but also increases the probability that Councilmembers will hear the comments.

In our City's efforts to move forward towards becoming a more inclusive, equitable, and accessible community, it has become clear over the last two-and-a-half years that the ability to provide remote public comment is a necessity.

We urge you, the City Council, to take the necessary steps to make public participation in local government more inclusive, accessible, and equitable for all.

Sincerely,
Natalya Zernitskaya
President
League of Women Voters of Santa Monica