Testimony

General Laws Subcommittee on Open Government/Procurement

HB1040

Virginia Freedom of Information Act; definition of "caregiver," remote participation in meetings.

The League of Women Voters of Virginia supports HB 1040. As remote participation grows we should not leave behind people with disabilities or those who care for disabled people. Remote participation protects people with disabilities who are at risk from severe outcomes from COVID-19, RSV, and other infectious diseases. Disabled people may also need to participate remotely because they cannot travel or need to be at their homes due to their disabilities. It is time to stop punishing people with disabilities and their caretakers for needing to participate remotely and to have their voices fully heard.

HB894

Virginia Freedom of Information Act; electronic meetings.

The League of Women Voters supports HB894. The amendments will make the work of the people more open and convenient in three ways.

First, permitting 50 percent of the meetings each year to be conducted electronically makes the meetings more accessible to both the members and the public. By making the meetings more accessible to the members, achieving a quorum is more likely, so the public body runs more efficiently and productively. By making the meetings more accessible to the public, the public body's members receive more information and perspectives to use in their consideration and deliberations. And citizens with disabilities will more readily attend.

Second, the bill would clarify the effect of losing audio-visual connection with a member. When the meeting uses audio-visual connection, being able to see the members present improves interactions among them and with the public. It makes sense that losing the connection could impact a quorum.

Third, requiring the public body to reassess its electronic meeting annually makes everyone involved think about the policy and modify it as appropriate.

These three improvements are common sense. We urge you to vote "aye."