



Technical Brief

May 2017

Telephonic & Videoconference Meetings

During the 2017 Legislative Session, HB 1119 amended Section 25-41-5 of the Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated. This section of the Open Meetings Act allows boards to hold meetings by telephone or videoconference and sets out the requirements for those meetings. Any board member or all members can participate in any meeting by telephone or videoconference.

The section was previously amended several times over several years to accommodate the increasing use of mobile phones. Yet a few requirements remained in the statute which did not enhance the public's access to meetings and made it more difficult for members of public boards to participate by telephone.

The Ethics Commission wanted to simplify and streamline this process without limiting public access to telephonic meetings. Rep. Jerry Turner, Chairman of the House Accountability, Efficiency and Transparency Committee authored House Bill 1119, which passed the Legislature and was signed by the Governor. The bill takes effect on July 1, 2017, and makes the following changes to the Open Meetings Act:

- The equipment used (speaker phone or video conference equipment) must be located at the place where the board normally meets or the announced location of a special meeting (board or council room).
- The equipment must allow all members of the board and the public to hear the deliberations.
- Votes must be taken in a manner clearly audible or visible to members of the board and public. (A board member on the telephone cannot see a show of hands.)
- Special 5-day notice of telephonic or video conference meetings is no longer required. If a member is unable to attend the meeting due to some unforeseeable reason, such as illness, that member can still participate in the meeting.
- The bill also removes the requirement to make an audio recording of telephonic meetings and a video recording of videoconference meetings. Boards can still record and/or broadcast their meetings if they want.