

New York Coalition



For Open Government, Inc.

Advocating for timely access to information & meaningful citizen participation

www.nyopengov.org

May 3, 2021

To: All New York State Legislators

From: New York Coalition For Open Government

Re: Necessary Amendments for A1108A/S04704A

The New York Coalition For Open Government thanks Legislators Amy Paulin and Anna Kaplan for their interest in improving the Open Meetings Law. However, we have serious concerns about amendments made to both bills.

The Open Meetings Law (OML) currently requires that meeting minutes be available upon request within two weeks of a meeting occurring. The OML does not mandate the posting of meeting minutes online. The legislation that was originally introduced with the support of the New York Coalition For Open Government called for public bodies with websites to post their meeting minutes online with two weeks of a meeting.

The original legislation has been amended to state that unabridged video or audio recordings may be deemed to be meeting minutes. The amendment further states that the creation of meeting minutes is not required.

The New York Coalition For Open Government supports posting video recordings of meetings online, however video recordings should be in addition to posting meeting minutes and not in lieu of them.

The goal of the original legislation was to require the posting of written meeting minutes online to make more information available to the public. In Vermont, meeting minutes are posted online within five days of a meeting. Virginia requires that minutes be posted online within ten working days.

It is important to have a written record of who attended a meeting; what motions were made and what votes occurred. Reading several pages of meeting minutes is a quick way to learn what happened at a meeting. It is much more difficult to learn what happened at a meeting through an unabridged recording. For individuals who are hearing impaired, posting recordings of meetings instead of written meeting minutes will be a problem.

Meeting minutes are currently being done by most public bodies and posting minutes online should not be considered a burdensome task. The amended bills defeat the original intent of the legislation and will make it harder for interested members of the public to learn what happened at a meeting.

The New York Coalition For Open Government opposes the passage of A1108A and S04704A, as currently drafted. We encourage you to proceed instead with the original bills that were introduced.