



February 26, 2021

The Honorable Blanca Rubio  
Member of the California State Assembly  
California State Capitol  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: AB703 – OPPOSE**

Dear Assemblymember Rubio:

I write today on behalf of the Los Angeles Sunshine Coalition, an unincorporated association that, since 2014, has worked to expand transparency in local government through education, advocacy, litigation, and activism. Our members regularly attend public meetings at which we give comment, record and publish videos of the proceedings, and audit local agency compliance with the Brown Act.

In March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Los Angeles closed City Hall to the public and initiated a policy, still in place as I write, to hold all public meetings remotely. We in the Coalition were worried that this would have the effect of inhibiting public participation, but our minds were collectively blown when we saw that precisely the opposite had happened.

Remote access to meetings has widened public participation beyond anything we could have imagined before the Spring of 2020. Unprecedented numbers of Angelenos now have the ability to attend meetings in any part of this huge city without travel time, to attend multiple meetings in a day, and to participate in multiple meetings simultaneously, all of which were impossible without remote participation.

For these reasons the Coalition is strongly in favor of ongoing mandatory remote public participation in meetings subject to the Brown Act. However, AB703 would also remove the requirement that a quorum of a legislative body participate from inside the jurisdiction, the requirement that agendas be posted for 72 hours at teleconference locations, and the requirement that members of the public be allowed to attend each teleconference location in person. These changes are not only unnecessary to achieve the stated purpose of the bill, but they will almost surely be abused to undermine the purpose of the Brown Act.

We attend meetings of many small legislative bodies of local agencies, e.g. charter schools and business improvement districts. It's not uncommon to see meetings with four or five teleconference locations scattered across Los Angeles County, all of which are currently, once the emergency ends, required to allow in-person participation. This requirement supports public participation by multiplying the number of sites available for its practice.

AB703 would not only end this requirement, but by eliminating the requirement that a quorum attend from within the jurisdiction it would effectively end any mandatory allowance for in-person participation. We are certain from our collective experience with local small-scale legislative bodies that if this requirement were removed many of them would end in-person meetings completely.

The ability to physically observe legislative bodies at their work is essential to public participation. Just for instance, many of our members have watched legislative bodies texting during meetings and subsequently obtained copies of their texts via the Public Records Act. Ending mandatory in-person participation would make such activity much easier to cover up.

However, the most important reason we have for opposing this bill is that it exacerbates existing digital inequities. Even in the twenty first year of the Twenty First Century there are people who don't have smart phones, or computers, or high speed internet access. They can't view agendas online, but AB703 ends required posting at teleconference locations. They can't call into meetings, but AB703 will allow legislative bodies to eliminate all other forms of real-time comment.

Finally, the excellent feature of this bill, the one that almost convinced us to support if amended, is its extension of remote participation after the pandemic ends. However, this is already included in the much more robust AB339, which we do support. That bill includes every good feature of AB703 with none of its flaws. For these reasons, the Los Angeles Sunshine Coalition has determined to oppose AB703.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adrian Riskin', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Adrian Riskin  
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