Governor Abbott Allows Virtual And Telephonic Open Meetings To Maintain Government Transparency

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Ensures continued government operation while preserving transparency

Governor Greg Abbott today acted to maintain government transparency and continued government operations while reducing face-to-face contact for government open meetings. As Texas works to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, the Governor granted the Office of the Attorney General's request for suspension of certain open-meeting statutes. This temporary suspension will allow for telephonic or videoconference meetings of governmental bodies that are accessible to the public in an effort to reduce in-person meetings that assemble large groups of people.

"Even as the State of Texas takes precautionary measures to contain the spread of COVID-19, we also have a responsibility to maintain government transparency," said Governor Abbott. "With today's action, Texas is reducing non-essential in-person contact for a limited period, while ensuring that state and local government entities continue to work to fulfill necessary functions and with full transparency for the people of Texas. I urge state and local officials to do their part to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 by avoiding meetings that bring people into large group settings."

In accordance with section 418.016 of the Texas Government Code, Governor Abbott has suspended various provisions that require government officials and members of the public to be physically present at a specified meeting location. This temporary suspension will leave important open-meeting protections in place:

- Members of the public will be entitled to participate and address the governmental body during any telephonic or videoconference meeting.
- To hold a telephonic or videoconference meeting, a governmental body must post a written notice that gives the public a way to participate remotely, such as a toll-free dial-in number, and that includes an electronic copy of any agenda packet that officials will consider at the meeting.
- A governmental body must provide the public with access to a recording of any telephonic or videoconference meeting.

State and local officials who have questions about open-meeting requirements after this suspension should submit them to the Office of the Attorney General via e-mail at TOMA@oag.texas.gov (mailto:TOMA@oag.texas.gov), or by leaving a message at (888) 672-6787. Officials with questions about teleconference and videoconference capabilities offered by the Texas Department of Information Resources should visit dir.texas.gov or call (512) 475-4700. Officials who hold videoconference meetings are encouraged to provide for participation via telephone for members of the public without videoconferencing capability. If officials are not holding a telephonic or videoconference meeting, all open-meeting requirements apply.

Office of the Texas Governor
P.O. Box 12428
Austin Texas 78711
(512) 463-2000