

The Open Meeting Law

Training for Duxbury, MA

July 24, 2013

Nina Pickering-Cook



OML Resources

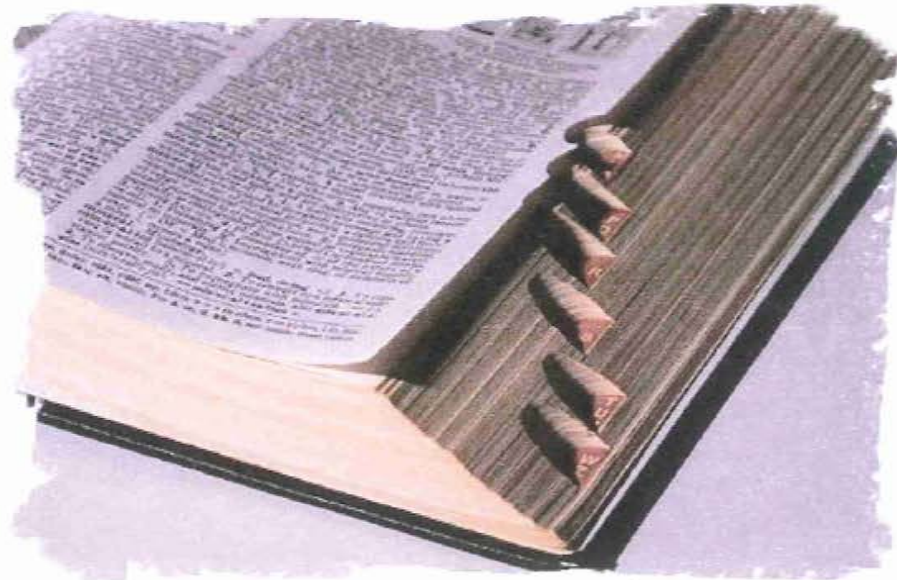
- New OML - Chapter 28 of the Acts of 2009
 - G.L. c. 30A, §§ 18-25, effective July 1, 2010
- Materials:
 - Tab 1 - AG's Guide to New OML
 - Tab 2 - AG's Regulations 940 CMR 29
 - Tab 3 - Public Body Checklist for Posting a Meeting Notice
 - Tab 4 – A&K Sample Motions to Enter Executive Session
 - Tab 5 - AG's OML FAQ (categorized)
- **Need More? Visit AG's Website**

Why Today's Training?

- Reminder of the Key Provisions in Order to Avoid Mistakes, Prevent Complaints, Protect Decisions and Ensure Both Your and the Town's Reputation.
- Review of the AG's Regulations and Review of Complaints and Enforcement.

Review of Key Definitions

- “Meeting”
- “Deliberation”
- “Public Body”
- “Intentional Violation”



“Meeting”

- “A deliberation by a public body with respect to any matter within the body’s jurisdiction.”
- *Exceptions:* attendance of a quorum at...
 - a **public or private gathering** (social, training or conference)
 - an **on-site inspection**
 - a **meeting of another public body**
 - “a meeting of a [state] **quasi-judicial board** or commission held for the **sole purpose of making a decision** required in an **adjudicatory proceeding**”
 - **Town Meeting** (but matters should not be deliberated on outside of public view)

... as long as the public body does not deliberate.

“Deliberation”

- “An oral or written communication through **any medium, including electronic mail**, between or among a quorum of a public body on any public business within its jurisdiction.”
- Includes Email, Blogs, You-Tube, Twitter, Facebook, Skype, Chat Rooms.
- **Advice: Keep it to yourself until you get to the meeting.**

Exceptions to “Deliberation”

- Distribution of:
 - Meeting agenda
 - Scheduling information
 - Procedural information
 - Reports or documents
- *Provided “no opinion of a member is expressed.”*
- *If commenting on documents, those comments should be emailed or otherwise relayed such that other members do not see the comments. Use staff, if possible.

“Public Body”

- **This Means You:**
 - Every board, commission, committee or subcommittee
 - Created, elected, appointed or otherwise constituted
 - Established to serve a public purpose
 - Including advisory sub-committees.
- **But not** Town department staff meetings or informal bodies formed to assist staff in the conduct of his/her duties.

“Intentional Violation”

- Act or omission
- By a public body or a member
- Knowingly violates the OML.
- Repeated conduct where “body or member has previously been informed by receipt of decision from a court...or by the [AG]” that the conduct violates the OML. 940 CMR 29.02.
 - Many enforcement actions cite this on first infraction.

New Certification

Exhibit A for the Prosecution

- AG Certification
 - Within 2 weeks of qualification for office
 - Obtained by appointing authority or town clerk
- Evidence that the violation was intentional where a member “has read and understands the requirements of the open meeting law and the consequences of violating it.” See *AG Enforcement Action OML 2011-26*.

Notice and Posting Rules

- Contents of Notice
 - Date, Time, Place of the Meeting
 - Date and time notice was posted
 - **Topics the Chair “reasonably anticipates”** (Agenda items). *But what does that mean?!*
 - Must be sufficiently specific to advise public of the issues to be discussed.
 - Boilerplate disclaimer is not enough.
 - The Chair does *not* need to guess at what items might arise. However, AG advises that public bodies avoid discussing a controversial or especially important topic until that topic has been properly listed in a meeting notice.

Time for Posting Notice

- 48 hours ahead.
 - Meetings cannot be “continued” in order to avoid additional posting.
- **Excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and Holidays**
- Email or hand deliver to Town Clerk
- Emergency – post Notice ASAP
- **Meeting Night**
 - **Monday** - Post by 4:45PM Thursday
 - **Tuesday** - Post by 4:45PM Friday
 - **Wednesday** - Post by 4:45PM Monday
 - **Thursday** - Post by 4:45PM Tuesday
 - **Friday** - Post by 4:45PM Wednesday

Posting Method

- Town Clerk posts notice
 - **Must be conspicuously visible to the public at all hours in or on Town Hall**
 - Accessible in the Town Clerk's office
- If not visible 24/7 at Town Hall, then local public body must use AG-prescribed alternative method
 - But must post notice of alternative method so that it is conspicuously visible 24/7 "on or adjacent to the main and handicapped accessible entrances to" Town Hall

Duxbury's Posting Method

- Posting for Duxbury is done at the bulletin board in Town Hall and the notebook outside the back door.
 - Town may want to consider using website as official posting method
- All public bodies “**shall** consistently use the municipality’s most current notice posting method on file with the Attorney General”



Meeting Procedures

Chair Controls

- Public participation:
 - With Chair's permission, address meeting.
 - At Chair's request, be silent
 - If continued disruption after clear warning:
 - Chair may **order the person to leave**
 - If the person doesn't leave, chair may authorize a constable or other officer to **remove the person** from the meeting.

Electronic Recording

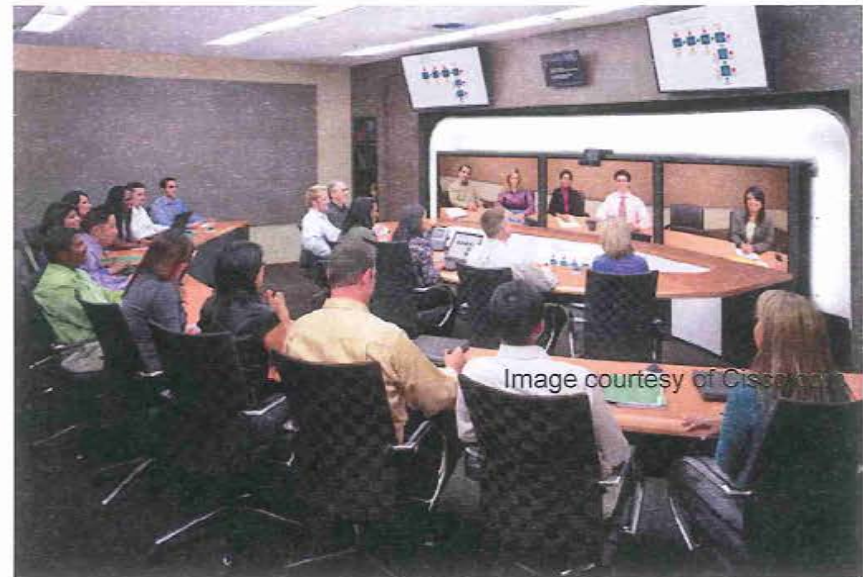
- **Public has a right to record meeting**
 - Transmit through any medium (audio or video)
- Requirements
 - Notify chair
 - Chair informs public at outset
 - Chair reasonably regulates to avoid disruption

- **Welcome to**



Remote Participation

- Participation by members of a Public Body in a meeting by telephone or other media now allowed per AG's regulation.
- By statute, must have:
(1) physical quorum;
(2) Chair physically present; and (3) all must be audible.



AG's Regulations on Remote Participation

- Encourages physical presence if possible
- BOS must vote to adopt, applying to all public bodies, and determine the amount and payment of costs for such capability.
- Compliance with statutory requirements
- Remote members **can vote** and are not absent
- Remote participation allowed if presence is “unreasonably difficult” due to:
 - Personal illness or disability;
 - Emergency;
 - Military service; or
 - Geographical location
- How? By telephone or internet enabled **audio conferencing**; or telephone, internet, or satellite enabled **video conferencing** (as determined by the individual Public Body).

AG's Regulations on Remote Participation

- Technical difficulties? Must try to resolve; if unable then note disconnection in meeting minutes.
- Procedures for Remote Participation:
 1. Member must notify Chair within "reasonable period of time" prior to the meeting
 2. If multiple requests would affect quorum, Chair's discretion who may participate remotely
 3. At start of meeting, Chair must state (i) name of those remotely participating; (ii) reasons; (iii) physical location. Must reflect in minutes.
 4. May participate in Executive Session upon statement that no unauthorized individuals are present
 - 5. All votes must be roll call votes.**
 6. Chair will try to distribute documents used during meeting to remote participants prior to meeting.

Executive Session Procedure

- Convene in open session
- **Chair must publicly state** the purpose for the executive session and **all subjects that may be discussed without compromising the purpose** for the executive session and announce whether open session will reconvene at end of executive session.
- Take roll call vote of majority of members to enter executive session (record in minutes)
- Maintain accurate minutes of executive session
- Take all votes by roll call (no secret ballots)
- **Not discuss any matter other than purpose for which executive session is lawfully called.**

NOTE - These are not merely “technicalities,” according to the AG.

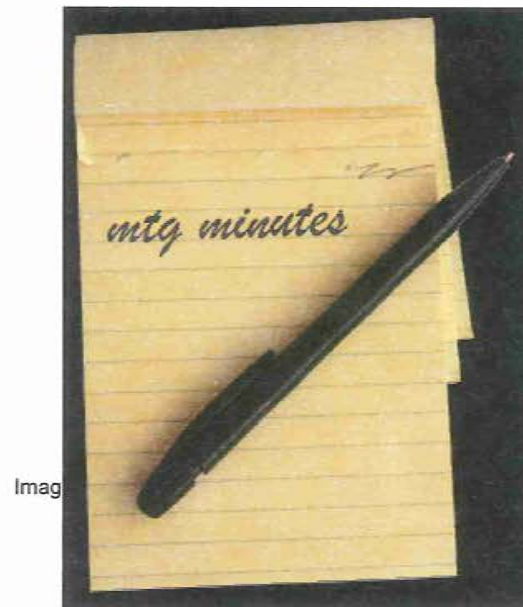
Only 10 Purposes for an Executive Session

1. Discuss reputation, character, health, discipline, charges, complaints, but not professional competence of individual.
2. Conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations, to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations, with nonunion personnel. Contract must be approved in open session.
3. **Discuss strategy for collective bargaining or litigation.***
4. Security personnel or devices
5. Criminal misconduct
6. **Acquisition of real property***
7. Comply with law or grant-in-aid requirement
8. **Preliminary Screening for employment***
9. Confer with mediator on litigation or decision
10. Trade secrets in the course of activities conducted by a public body as an energy supplier

*** If holding an open meeting would have a detrimental effect and the chair so declares on record beforehand**

Expanded Minutes

- Was:
 - Date
 - Time
 - Place
 - Members
 - Actions
 - Votes
- Now A/so Includes:
 - **Summary of Matters Discussed**
 - **List of Documents “Used”**



Open Session Minutes and Records

- Meeting minutes
 - Must create and approve in a timely manner
- Documents and exhibits used
 - list in minutes and retain
- Public Records subject to request (unless specifically exempt)
 - **Minutes, even if still in draft form**
 - **Notes, recordings, materials used to prepare minutes**
 - Documents and exhibits used

Executive Session Minutes and Records

- Disclose once publication will no longer defeat executive session purpose unless
 - Exempt from public records law or
 - Attorney-client privileged
- **Review periodically**
 - By chair or public body
 - Determine if purpose of executive session remains.
 - Include determination in subsequent meeting minutes

Timetables to Review Minutes

- Open Session Minutes
 - Available on request in 10 days
- Executive Session Minutes
 - Review at regular intervals to determine whether reason for withholding continues
 - Provide within 10 days in response to a request, unless a review has not yet been undertaken, in which case **board must review minutes at its next meeting or within 30 days, whichever comes first**



Image courtesy of <http://www.ivc.edu>

Complaint Process

Self-Correction

- Person Files Complaint
 - With Town Clerk within 30 days.
 - Must file two copies: One with Town Clerk, another with the Public Body.
- Public Body's Response
 - **Review complaint, send copy to AG, describe actions taken to resolve issues**
 - Within 14 Business Days
 - 24 Business Days if additional info needed
 - Further extension discretionary with AG

Escalated Complaint Process

- “Can’t Get No Satisfaction”

- File Complaint with AG
- Within 90 days after alleged OML violation



“I don’t like this complaint department.”

AG's Enforcement Tools

- **Increasingly Onerous for Volunteer Board**
 - Investigate
 - Request additional information
 - Conduct hearing
 - Issue subpoenas
 - Take testimony
 - Determine whether violation occurred
 - Determine whether violation was intentional

Attorney General Remedies

- **Increasingly Painful to Board, Individual and Town**

- Compel OML compliance
- Compel release of minutes or other materials
- Compel OML training attendance
- **Nullify action** taken in violation of OML
- **Reinstate employee and make whole**
- **Impose civil penalty** for intentional violation



- Up to \$1,000 per violation
- Imposed on public body
- If AG believes violation was intentional, the matter will be referred to a full hearing to determine if fine is appropriate.
- Specify other appropriate relief
- File suit to compel compliance with AG's Order

Appeal of AG Order

- Appeal
 - **By public body or aggrieved member**
 - To Superior Court
 - Within 21 days of receipt of AG's order
- Appeal stays AG's order
 - But if AG's order nullifies action of public body, "the body shall not implement such action pending judicial review"

Alternative OML Enforcement

- Plaintiff: **AG or 3 or more voters**
- Suit: in Superior Court to enforce OML
- Remedies:
 - Same as AG's plus
 - All other remedies available to Superior Court
- Goal: “speediest possible determination”
- Burden of proof: on defendants (**i.e. you**)

Civil Penalties

- **Can Individual Be Subject to \$\$\$ Penalty? *Still unclear.***
 - Discrepancy between language in statute and regulations speaking of “civil penalty” or “fine” upon public body and statutory language indicating individual could be liable for such penalty **has not been resolved by the AG’s guidance documents.**
 - No cases imposing such a penalty so far.
- Defense to penalty = “public body, after full disclosure, acted in good faith compliance with the advice of the public body’s legal counsel.”

Complaints & Enforcement

Complaints:

- AG receives about 150 complaints per year (since 2011)
- Improper observance of executive session formalities, inadequate meeting posting and improper deliberations are the most often cited violations.

Enforcement:

- Typical enforcement action includes (1) a reminder to comply going forward, and (2) a warning that any future violation of the same section will be considered an intentional violation, thus subjecting the public body to a hearing and possibly fines.

Lessons Learned from AG

- Often, **no enforcement action if the body takes steps to cure** the action before the complaint reaches the AG (releases withheld minutes, re-votes, re-deliberates in open session, etc.)
- AG will reject cure where it is only “ceremonial” given intentional nature of violation.
- AG often cites “**spirit of the OML**” in determining whether violations occurred and, in a few cases, whether they were intentional
- **Formalities of executive session are *not* treated as mere technicalities**, but substantive violations of the OML.
- **Meeting notices need to be as specific as possible** – list locations and/or names of topics being discussed (i.e. discussion of permit for 3 Main Street, discussion of appointment of John Smith for Police Chief)
- OML does not require Chair to guess at all topics that might possibly be raised to be included in the meeting notice.

Enforcement Case Study

UMass Board of Trustees– Presidential Search Committee (OML 2011-34)

- AG investigated UMass Presidential Search process
- “Wide-ranging” and “serious” OML violations found:
 - Improperly discussed professional competence in executive session rather than noticed topic of reputation and character.
 - Reached consensus on candidate in secret (during Executive Session)
 - Purported to enter executive session under purpose of complying with law, but failed to cite any law
 - Allowed members to participate by phone without permission
 - Did not notice each meeting and executive session and instead attempted to treat them as “continued” meetings.
 - Did not open meetings in open session before entering Executive Session
 - Minutes did not include list of documents used or sufficient summary of discussion
 - Notices did not contain list of topics to be discussed
 - Created a subcommittee which was also public body and which also failed to follow OML
- Board required to, among other things: (1) undergo OML training before appointing new Chancellor; (2) submit copies to AG of all required meeting notices and meeting minutes created during the chancellor appointment process; and (3) create, review and approve minutes for the Search Committee where none exist.

Take Aways

- To comply:
 - Observe the formalities
 - Stow opinions for the meeting
- To violate
 - Ignore the formalities
 - Express opinions in e-media
- Complaints
 - Easier to make
 - Easier to prove: Electronic records
- Consequences
 - Increasingly serious
 - Time, money, energy, penalties

An Ounce of Prevention ...

- Posting problem – Postpone the meeting
- Item not listed on posted notice - Save it for later
- Receive problematic email
 - Gently remind board member individually not to do so
 - Remind fellow board members at a meeting not to do so
- Receive several problematic emails
 - Ask Town Manager to admonish offender
- See a pattern of problematic emails
 - Ask Town Manager to involve Town Counsel
- Discussion strays off topic in executive session
 - Speak up – get back on topic
- **Police yourselves before others police you.**



Tab 1

Open Meeting Law Guide



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF ATTORNEY GENERAL
MARTHA COAKLEY

MARCH 12, 2013

Dear Massachusetts Residents:

On July 1, 2010, the Attorney General's Office assumed responsibility for the enforcement of the Open Meeting Law (OML) from the state's District Attorneys. We believe that transferring all enforcement to one central statewide office will allow for greater consistency and will ensure that local officials have access to the information they need to comply with the law.

Our office is committed to ensuring that the changes to the Open Meeting Law will provide for greater transparency and clarity – both of which are hallmarks of good government. We are focused on providing educational materials, outreach and training sessions to ensure that all members of the public understand the law.

Whether you are a town clerk or town manager, a member of a public body, or an involved resident, I want to thank you for taking the time to understand the Open Meeting Law. We strive to be a resource to you, and encourage you to contact the Division of Open Government at (617) 963-2540 or visit our website at www.mass.gov/ago/openmeeting for more information.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Martha Coakley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Martha Coakley
Massachusetts Attorney General

Attorney General's Open Meeting Law Guide

Overview

Purpose of the Law

The purpose of the Open Meeting Law is to ensure transparency in the deliberations on which public policy is based. Because the democratic process depends on the public having knowledge about the considerations underlying governmental action, the Open Meeting Law requires, with some exceptions, that meetings of public bodies be open to the public. It also seeks to balance the public's interest in witnessing the deliberations of public officials with the government's need to manage its operations efficiently.

AGO Authority

The Open Meeting Law was revised as part of the 2009 Ethics Reform Bill, and now centralizes responsibility for statewide enforcement of the law in the Attorney General's Office (AGO). G.L. c. 30A, § 19 (a). To help public bodies understand and comply with the revised law, the Attorney General has created the Division of Open Government. The Division of Open Government provides training, responds to inquiries, investigates complaints, and when necessary, makes findings and takes remedial action to address violations of the law. The purpose of this Guide is to inform elected and appointed members of public bodies, as well as the interested public, of the basic requirements of the law.

Certification

Within two weeks of a member's election or appointment or the taking of the oath of office, whichever occurs later, all members of public bodies must complete the attached Certificate of Receipt of Open Meeting Law Materials certifying that they have received these materials, and that they understand the requirements of the Open Meeting Law and the consequences for violating it. The certification must be retained where the body maintains its official records. All public body members should familiarize themselves with the Open Meeting Law, the Attorney General's regulations, and this Guide.

In the event a Certificate has not yet been completed by a member of a public body, the member should complete and submit the Certificate at the earliest opportunity to be considered in compliance with the law.

Open Meeting Website

This Guide is intended to be a clear and concise explanation of the Open Meeting Law's requirements. The complete law, as well as the Attorney General's regulations, training materials, advisory opinions and orders can be found on the Attorney General's Open Meeting website, <http://www.mass.gov/ago/openmeeting>. Local and state

government officials, members of public bodies and the public are encouraged to visit the website regularly for updates, as well as to view additional Open Meeting Law materials.

What meetings are covered by the Open Meeting Law?

With certain exceptions, all meetings of a public body must be open to the public. A meeting is generally defined as “a deliberation by a public body with respect to any matter within the body’s jurisdiction.” As explained more fully below, a deliberation is a communication between or among members of a public body.

These four questions will help determine whether a communication constitutes a meeting subject to the law:

- 1) is the communication between members of a **public body**;
- 2) does the communication constitute a **deliberation**;
- 3) does the communication involve a matter within the body’s **jurisdiction**; and
- 4) does the communication fall within an **exception** listed in the law?

What constitutes a public body?

While there is no comprehensive list of public bodies, any multi-member board, commission, committee or subcommittee within the executive or legislative branches¹ of state government, or within any county, district, city, region or town, if established to serve a public purpose, is subject to the law. The law includes any multi-member body created to advise or make recommendations to a public body, and also includes the governing board of any local housing or redevelopment authority, and the governing board or body of any authority established by the Legislature to serve a public purpose. The law excludes the Legislature and its committees, bodies of the judicial branch, and bodies appointed by a constitutional officer solely for the purpose of advising a constitutional officer.

Boards of selectmen and school committees are certainly subject to the Open Meeting Law, as are subcommittees of public bodies, regardless of whether their role is decision-making or advisory. Neither individual government officials, such as a town manager or police chief, nor members of their staff, are “public bodies” subject to the law, and so they may meet with one another to discuss public business without needing to comply with Open Meeting Law requirements.

Bodies appointed by a public official solely for the purpose of advising on a decision that the individual could make himself or herself are not public bodies subject to the Open Meeting Law. For example, a school superintendent appoints a four member advisory body to assist her in nominating candidates for school principal, a task the

¹ Although the Legislature itself is not a public body subject to the Open Meeting Law, certain legislative commissions are required to follow the Law’s requirements.

superintendent could perform herself. That advisory body would not be subject to the Open Meeting Law.²

What constitutes a deliberation?

The Open Meeting Law defines deliberation as “an oral or written communication through any medium, including electronic mail, between or among a quorum of a public body on any public business within its jurisdiction.” Distribution of a meeting agenda, scheduling or procedural information, or reports or documents that may be discussed at a meeting is often helpful to public body members when preparing for upcoming meetings, and will generally not constitute deliberation, provided that when these materials are distributed no member of the public body expresses an opinion on matters within the body’s jurisdiction.

To be a deliberation, the communication must involve a quorum of the public body. A quorum is usually a simple majority of the members of a public body. Thus, a communication among fewer than a quorum of the members of a public body will not be a deliberation, unless there are multiple communications among the members of the public body that together constitute communication among a quorum of members. Courts have held that the Open Meeting Law applies when members of a public body communicate in a manner that seeks to evade the application of the law. Thus, in some circumstances, communications between two members of a public body, when taken together with other communications, may be a deliberation. Note also that the expression of an opinion on matters within the body’s jurisdiction to a quorum of a public body is a deliberation, even if no other public body member responds.

What matters are within the jurisdiction of the public body?

The Open Meeting Law applies only to the discussion of any “matter within the body’s jurisdiction.” The law does not specifically define “jurisdiction.” As a general rule, any matter of public business on which a quorum of the public body may make a decision or recommendation is considered a matter within the jurisdiction of the public body. Certain discussions regarding procedural or administrative matters may also relate to public business within a body’s jurisdiction, such as where the discussion involves the organization and leadership of the public body, committee assignments, rules or bylaws for the body, and discussions of whether the body should consider or take action on specific topics at a future meeting. However, statements characterizing past acts for political purposes are generally not considered communications on public business within the jurisdiction of the public body.

What are the exceptions to the definition of a meeting?

There are five exceptions to the definition of a meeting under the Open Meeting Law.

² See Connelly v. School Committee of Hanover, 409 Mass. 232 (1991).

1. Members of a public body may conduct an on-site inspection of a project or program; however, they cannot deliberate at such gatherings;
2. Members of a public body may attend a conference, training program or event; however, they cannot deliberate at such gatherings;
3. Members of a public body may attend a meeting of another public body provided that they communicate only by open participation; however, they cannot deliberate at such gatherings;
4. Meetings of quasi-judicial boards or commissions held solely to make decisions in an adjudicatory proceeding are not subject to the Open Meeting Law; and,
5. Town Meetings are not subject to the Open Meeting Law. See G.L. c. 39, §§ 9, 10 (establishing procedures for Town Meeting).

For “quasi-judicial boards or commissions,” the AGO interprets this exemption to apply only to certain state “quasi-judicial” bodies, and a very limited number of public bodies at other levels of government whose proceedings are specifically defined as “agencies” for purposes of G.L. c. 30A.

We have received several inquiries about the exception for Town Meeting, and whether it applies to deliberation by Town Meeting members outside of a session of Town Meeting, to meetings of committees created by Town Meeting that occur outside a session of Town Meeting, or to deliberation by members of a public body – such as a board of selectmen – during Town Meeting. The Attorney General interprets this exemption to mean that the Open Meeting Law does not reach any aspect of Town Meeting. Therefore, the Attorney General will not investigate complaints alleging violations in these situations. Note, however, that this is a matter of interpretation and future Attorneys General may choose to apply the law in such situations.

What are the requirements for posting notice of meetings?

Except in cases of emergency, a public body must provide the public with notice of its meeting 48 hours in advance, excluding Saturdays, Sundays and legal holidays. Notice of emergency meetings must be posted as soon as reasonably possible prior to the meeting. Also note that other laws, such as those governing procedures for public hearings, may require additional notice.

What are the requirements for filing and posting meeting notices for local public bodies?

For local public bodies, meeting notices must be filed with the municipal clerk sufficiently in advance of a public meeting to permit posting of the notice at least 48 hours in advance of the public meeting. Notices may be posted on a bulletin board, in a loose-leaf binder or on an electronic display (e.g. television, computer monitor, or an electronic bulletin board), provided that the notice is conspicuously visible to the public at all hours in or on the municipal building in which the clerk’s office is located. In the event that the meeting notices posted in the municipal building are not visible to the public at all hours, then the municipality must either post notices on the outside of the building or follow one of the alternative posting methods approved by the Attorney General in 940 CMR 29.03(2)(b):

- public bodies may post notice of meetings on the municipal website;
- public bodies may post notice of meetings on cable television, **AND**, post notice or provide cable television access in an alternate municipal building (e.g., police or fire station) where the notice is accessible at all hours;
- public bodies may post notice of meetings in a newspaper of general circulation in the municipality, **AND**, post notice or a copy of the newspaper containing the meeting notice at an alternate municipal building (e.g., police or fire station) where the notice is accessible at all hours;
- public bodies may place a computer monitor or electronic or physical bulletin board displaying meeting notices on or in a door, window, or near the entrance of the municipal building in which the clerk's office is located in such a manner as to be visible to the public from outside the building; or
- public bodies may provide an audio recording of meeting notices, available to the public by telephone at all hours.

Note that even if an alternative posting method has been adopted, meeting notices must still be available in or around the clerk's office so that members of the public may view the notices during normal business hours. Prior to adopting an alternative posting method, the clerk of the municipality must inform the Division of Open Government of its notice posting method, and update the Division of any future change. All public bodies shall consistently use the most current notice posting method on file with the Division. A description of the alternative posting method must also be posted on or adjacent to the main and handicapped accessible entrances to the building where the clerk's office is located.

What are the requirements for posting notices for regional, district, county and state public bodies?

- For regional or district public bodies and regional school districts, meeting notices must be filed and posted in the same manner required of local public bodies, in each of the communities within the region or district. As an alternative method of notice, a regional or district public body may post a meeting notice on the regional or district public body's website. A copy of the notice shall be filed and kept by the chair of the public body or the chair's designee.
- County public bodies must file meeting notices in the office of the county commissioners and post notice of the meeting in a manner conspicuously visible to the public at all hours at a place or places designated by the county commissioners for notice postings. As an alternative method of notice, a county public body may post a meeting on the county public body's website. A copy of the notice shall be filed and kept by the chair of the county public body or the chair's designee.

- State public bodies must file meeting notices by posting the notice on the website of the public body or its parent agency. The chair of a state public body must notify the Attorney General in writing of the website address where notices will be posted, and of any subsequent changes to that posting location. A copy of the notice must also be sent to the Secretary of State's Regulations Division, and should be forwarded to the Executive Office of Administration and Finance, which maintains a listing of state public body meetings.

[A note about accessibility](#)

Public bodies are subject to all applicable state and federal laws that govern accessibility for persons with disabilities. These laws include the Americans with Disabilities Act, the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and state constitutional provisions. For instance, public bodies that adopt website posting as an alternative method of notice must ensure that the website utilizes technology that is readily accessible to people with disabilities, including individuals who use screen readers. All open meetings of public bodies must be accessible to persons with disabilities. Meeting locations must be accessible by wheelchair, without the need for special assistance. Also sign language interpreters for deaf or hearing-impaired persons must be provided, subject to reasonable advance notice.³ The Attorney General's Disability Rights Project is available to answer questions about accessibility and may be reached at (617) 727-2200.

[What information must meeting notices contain?](#)

Meeting notices must be posted in a legible, easily understandable format; contain the date, time and place of the meeting; and list all topics that the chair reasonably anticipates, 48 hours in advance, will be discussed at the meeting. The list of topics must be sufficiently specific to reasonably inform the public of the issues to be discussed at the meeting. Where there are no anticipated topics for discussion in open session other than the procedural requirements for convening an executive session, the public body should list "open session" as a topic, in addition to the executive session, so the public is aware that it has the opportunity to attend and learn the basis for the executive session.

While not required under the Open Meeting Law, public bodies are encouraged to make a revised list of topics to be discussed available to the public in advance of the meeting if the body intends to discuss topics that come up after posting, but before the meeting convenes.

³ The Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing will assist with arrangements for a sign language interpreter. The Commission may be reached at 617-740-1600 VOICE and 617-740-1700 TTY.

When can a public body meet in executive session?

While all meetings of public bodies must be open to the public, certain topics may be discussed in executive, or closed, session. Before going into an executive session, the chair of the public body must first:

- Convene in open session;
- State the reason for the executive session, stating all subjects that may be revealed without compromising the purpose for which the executive session was called;
- State whether the public body will reconvene in open session at the end of the executive session; and
- Take a roll call vote of the body to enter executive session.

Where a public body member is participating in an executive session remotely, he or she must state at the start of the executive session that no other person is present and/or able to hear the discussion at the remote location. The public body may authorize, by a simple majority vote, the presence and participation of other individuals at the remote participant's location.

While in executive session, the public body must keep accurate records and must take a roll call vote of all votes taken and may only discuss matters for which the executive session was called.

The Ten Purposes for Executive Session

The law states ten specific Purposes for which an executive session may be held, and emphasizes that these are the only reasons for which a public body may enter executive session.

The ten Purposes for which a public body may vote to hold an executive session are:

1. **To discuss the reputation, character, physical condition or mental health, rather than professional competence, of an individual, or to discuss the discipline or dismissal of, or complaints or charges brought against, a public officer, employee, staff member or individual. The individual to be discussed in such executive session shall be notified in writing by the public body at least 48 hours prior to the proposed executive session; provided, however, that notification may be waived upon written agreement of the parties.**

This Purpose is designed to protect the rights and reputation of individuals. Nevertheless, it appears that where a public body is discussing an employee evaluation, considering applicants for a position, or discussing the qualifications of any individual, these discussions should be held in open session to the extent that the discussion deals with issues other than the reputation, character, health, or any complaints or charges against the individual. An executive session called for this Purpose triggers certain rights on the part of an individual who is the subject of the discussion. The individual's right to choose to have this discussion in an open meeting takes precedence over the right of the public body to go into executive session.

While the imposition of disciplinary sanctions by a public body on an individual fits within this Purpose, this Purpose does not apply if, for example, the public body is deciding whether to lay off a large number of employees because of budgetary constraints.

2. To conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel;

Collective Bargaining Sessions: These include not only the bargaining sessions, but also include grievance hearings that are required by a collective bargaining agreement.

While a public body may negotiate with nonunion personnel or conduct a collective bargaining session with a union in executive session, and may even agree on final contract terms in executive session, the public body must vote to approve or ratify any contract or collective bargaining agreement in open session before it can take effect.

3. To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigation position of the public body and the chair so declares;

Collective Bargaining Strategy: Discussions with respect to collective bargaining strategy include discussion of proposals for wage and benefit packages or working conditions for union employees. The public body, if challenged, has the burden of proving that an open meeting might have a detrimental effect on its bargaining position. The showing that must be made is that an open discussion may have a detrimental effect on the collective bargaining process; the body is not required to demonstrate or specify a definite harm that would have arisen. At the time the executive session is proposed and voted on, the chair must state on the record that having the discussion in an open session may be detrimental to the public body's bargaining or litigation position.

Litigation Strategy: Discussions concerning strategy with respect to ongoing litigation obviously fit within this Purpose, but only if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the public body. Discussions relating to potential litigation are not covered by this exemption unless that litigation is clearly and imminently threatened or otherwise demonstrably likely. That a person is represented by counsel and supports a position adverse to the public body's does not by itself mean that litigation is imminently threatened or likely. Nor does the fact that a newspaper reports a party has threatened to sue necessarily mean imminent litigation.

Note: A public body's discussions with its counsel do not automatically fall under this or any other Purpose for holding an executive session.

4. **To discuss the deployment of security personnel or devices, or strategies with respect thereto;**

5. **To investigate charges of criminal misconduct or to consider the filing of criminal complaints;**

This Purpose permits an executive session to investigate charges of criminal misconduct and to consider the filing of criminal complaints. Thus, it primarily involves discussions that would precede the formal criminal process in court. Purpose 1 is related, in that it permits an executive session to discuss certain complaints or charges, which may include criminal complaints or charges, but only those that have already been brought. Also, unlike Purpose 5, Purpose 1 confers certain rights of participation on the individual involved, as well as the right for the individual to insist that the discussion occur in open session. To the limited extent that there is overlap between Purposes 1 and 5, a public body has discretion to choose which Purpose to invoke when going into executive session.

6. **To consider the purchase, exchange, lease or value of real property if the chair declares that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the public body;**

Under this Purpose, as with the collective bargaining and litigation Purpose, an executive session may only be held where an open meeting may have a detrimental impact on the body's negotiating position with a third party. At the time that the executive session is proposed and voted on, the chair must state on the record that having the discussion in an open session may be detrimental to the public body's negotiating position.

7. **To comply with, or act under the authority of, any general or special law or federal grant-in-aid requirements;**

There may be provisions in state statutes or federal grants that require or specifically allow a public body to consider a particular issue in a closed session. Before entering executive session under this purpose, the public body must cite the specific law or federal grant-in-aid requirement that necessitates confidentiality.

8. **To consider or interview applicants for employment or appointment by a preliminary screening committee if the chair declares that an open meeting will have a detrimental effect in obtaining qualified applicants; provided, however, that this clause shall not apply to any meeting, including meetings of a preliminary screening committee, to consider and interview applicants who have passed a prior preliminary screening;**

This Purpose permits a hiring subcommittee of a public body or a preliminary screening committee to conduct the initial screening process in executive session. This Purpose does not apply to any stage in the hiring process after the screening committee or subcommittee votes to recommend candidates to its parent body, however it may include multiple rounds of interviews by the screening committee aimed at narrowing

the group of applicants down to finalists. At the time that the executive session is proposed and voted on, the chair must state on the record that having the discussion in an open session will be detrimental to the public body's ability to attract qualified applicants for the position. If the public body opts to convene a preliminary screening committee, the committee must contain fewer than a quorum of the members of the parent public body. The committee may also contain members who are not members of the parent public body.

Note that a public body is not required to create a preliminary screening committee to consider or interview applicants. However, if the body chooses to conduct the review of applicants itself, it may not do so in executive session.

9. To meet or confer with a mediator, as defined in section 23C of chapter 233, with respect to any litigation or decision on any public business within its jurisdiction involving another party, group or entity, provided that:

- (i) any decision to participate in mediation shall be made in an open session and the parties, issues involved and purpose of the mediation shall be disclosed; and
- (ii) no action shall be taken by any public body with respect to those issues which are the subject of the mediation without deliberation and approval for such action at an open session.

10. To discuss trade secrets or confidential, competitively-sensitive or other proprietary information provided:

- in the course of activities conducted by a governmental body as an energy supplier under a license granted by the department of public utilities pursuant to section 1F of chapter 164;
- in the course of activities conducted as a municipal aggregator under section 134 of said chapter 164; or
- in the course of activities conducted by a cooperative consisting of governmental entities organized pursuant to section 136 of said chapter 164;
- when such governmental body, municipal aggregator or cooperative determines that such disclosure will adversely affect its ability to conduct business in relation to other entities making, selling or distributing electric power and energy.

May a member of a public body participate remotely?

The Attorney General's Regulations, 940 CMR 29.10, permit remote participation in certain circumstances. However, the Attorney General strongly encourages members of public bodies to physically attend meetings whenever possible. Members of public bodies have a responsibility to ensure that remote participation in meetings is not used in a way that would defeat the purposes of the Open Meeting Law, namely promoting transparency with regard to deliberations and decisions on which public policy is based.

How can the practice of remote participation be adopted?

Remote participation may be used during a meeting of a public body if it has first been adopted by the chief executive officer of the municipality for local public bodies, the county commissioners for county public bodies, or by a majority vote of the public body for retirement boards, district, regional and state public bodies. The chief executive officer may be the board of selectmen, the city council, or the mayor, depending on the municipality. See G.L. c. 4, § 7.

If the chief executive officer in a municipality authorizes remote participation, that authorization must apply to all public bodies in the municipality. 940 CMR 29.10(2)(a). However, the chief executive officer determines the amount and source of payment for any costs associated with remote participation, and may decide to fund the practice only for certain public bodies. See 940 CMR 29.10(6)(e). In addition, the chief executive officer can authorize public bodies in that municipality to "opt out" of the practice altogether. See 940 CMR 29.10(8).

What are the permissible reasons for remote participation?

Once remote participation is adopted, any member of a public body may participate remotely if the chair or, in the chair's absence, the person chairing the meeting, determines that one of the following factors makes the member's physical attendance unreasonably difficult:

1. Personal illness;
2. Personal disability;
3. Emergency;
4. Military service; or
5. Geographic distance.

What are the acceptable means of remote participation?

Acceptable means of remote participation include telephone, internet, or satellite enabled audio or video conferencing, or any other technology that enables the remote participant and all persons present at the meeting location to be clearly audible to one another. Accommodations must be made for any public body member who requires TTY service, video relay service, or other form of adaptive telecommunications. Text messaging, instant messaging, email and web chat without audio are not acceptable methods of remote participation.

What are the minimum requirements for remote participation?

Any public body using remote participation during a meeting must ensure that the following minimum requirements are met:

1. A quorum of the body, including the chair or, in the chair's absence, the person chairing the meeting, must be physically present at the meeting location;

2. Members of a public body who participate remotely and all persons present at the meeting location must be clearly audible to each other; and
3. All votes taken during a meeting in which a member participates remotely must be by roll call vote.

What procedures must be followed if remote participation is used at a meeting?

At the start of any meeting during which a member of a public body will participate remotely, the chair must announce the name of any member who is participating remotely and which of the five reasons listed above requires that member's remote participation. The chair's statement does not need to contain any detail about the reason for the member's remote participation other than the section of the regulation that justifies it. This information must also be recorded in the meeting minutes.

Members of public bodies who participate remotely may vote, and shall not be deemed absent for purposes of G.L. c. 39, § 23D. In addition, members who participate remotely may participate in executive sessions, but must state at the start of any such session that no other person is present and/or able to hear the discussion at the remote location, unless the public body has approved the presence of that individual.

If technical difficulties arise as a result of utilizing remote participation, the chair or, in the chair's absence, person chairing the meeting may decide how to address the situation. Public bodies are encouraged, whenever possible, to suspend discussion while reasonable efforts are made to correct any problem that interferes with a remote participant's ability to hear or be heard clearly by all persons present at the meeting location. If a remote participant is disconnected from the meeting, the minutes must note that fact and the time at which the disconnection occurred.

What public participation in meetings must be allowed?

Under the Open Meeting Law, the public is permitted to attend meetings of public bodies but is excluded from an executive session that is called for a valid purpose listed in the law. Any member of the public also has a right to make an audio or video recording of an open session of a public meeting. A member of the public who wishes to record a meeting must first notify the chair and must comply with reasonable requirements regarding audio or video equipment established by the chair so as not to interfere with the meeting. The chair is required to inform other attendees of any such recording at the beginning of the meeting.

While the public is permitted to attend an open meeting, an individual may not address the public body without permission of the chair. An individual is not permitted to disrupt a meeting of a public body, and at the request of the chair, all members of the public shall be silent. If, after clear warning, a person continues to be disruptive, the chair may order the person to leave the meeting and, if the person does not leave, the chair may authorize a constable or other officer to remove the person.

What records of public meetings must be kept?

Public bodies are required to create and maintain accurate minutes of all meetings, including executive sessions. The minutes, which must be created and approved in a timely manner, must state the date, time and place of the meeting, a list of the members present or absent, and the decisions made and actions taken including a record of all votes. Minutes must also include the name of any member who participated in the meeting remotely and the reason under 940 CMR 29.10(5) for his or her remote participation. While the minutes must include a summary of the discussions on each subject, a transcript is not required. No vote taken by a public body, either in an open or in an executive session, shall be by secret ballot. All votes taken in executive session must be by roll call and the results recorded in the minutes. In addition, the minutes must include a list of the documents and other exhibits used at the meeting. While public bodies are required to retain these records in accordance with records retention laws, the documents and exhibits listed in the minutes need not be attached to or physically stored with the minutes.

The minutes, documents and exhibits are public records and a part of the official record of the meeting. Records may be subject to disclosure under either the Open Meeting Law or Public Records Law and must be retained in accordance with the Secretary of State's record retention schedule. The State and Municipal Record Retention Schedules are available through the Secretary of State's website at: <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arcrmu/rmuidx.htm>.

Open Session Meeting Records

The Open Meeting Law requires public bodies to create and approve minutes in a timely manner. The law requires that existing minutes be made available to the public within 10 days upon request, whether they have been approved or remain in draft form. Materials or other exhibits used by the public body in an open meeting must also be made available to the public within 10 days upon request.

There are two exemptions to the open session records disclosure requirement: 1) materials (other than those that were created by members of the public body for the purpose of the evaluation) used in a performance evaluation of an individual bearing on his professional competence, and 2) materials (other than any resume submitted by an applicant, which is subject to disclosure) used in deliberations about employment or appointment of individuals, including applications and supporting materials. Documents created by members of the public body for the purpose of performing an evaluation are subject to disclosure. This applies to both individual evaluations and evaluation compilations, provided the documents were created by members of the public body for the purpose of the evaluation.

Executive Session Meeting Records

Public bodies are not required to disclose the minutes, notes or other materials used in an executive session where the disclosure of these records may defeat the lawful purposes of the executive session. Once disclosure would no longer defeat the

purposes of the executive session, however, minutes and other records from that executive session must be disclosed unless they are within an exemption to the Public Records Law, G.L. c. 4, § 7, cl. 26, or the attorney-client privilege applies. Public bodies are also required to periodically review their executive session minutes to determine whether continued non-disclosure is warranted, and such determination must be included in the minutes of the body's next meeting. A public body must respond to a request to inspect or copy executive session minutes within 10 days of request and promptly release the records if they are subject to disclosure. If the body has not performed a review to determine whether they are subject to disclosure, it must do so prior to its next meeting or within 30 days, whichever is sooner.

[What is the Attorney General's role in enforcing the Open Meeting Law?](#)

The Attorney General's Division of Open Government is responsible for enforcing the Open Meeting Law. The Attorney General has the authority to take and investigate complaints, bring enforcement actions, issue advisory opinions, and issue regulations.

The Division of Open Government regularly seeks feedback from the public on ways in which it can better support public bodies to help them comply with the law's requirements, and offers online and in-person training on the Open Meeting Law. The Division of Open Government will also respond to information requests from public bodies and the public.

The Division of Open Government will take complaints from members of the public and will work with public bodies to resolve problems. While any member of the public may file a complaint with a public body alleging a violation of the Open Meeting Law, a public body need not, and the Division of Open Government will not, investigate anonymous complaints.

[What is the Open Meeting Law complaint procedure?](#)

[Step 1. Filing a Complaint with the Public Body](#)

Individuals who allege a violation of the Open Meeting Law must first file a complaint *with the public body* alleged to have violated the OML. The complaint must be filed within 30 days of the date of the violation, or the date the complainant could reasonably have known of the violation. The complaint must be filed on a [Complaint Form](#) available on the AGO website. When filing a complaint with a local public body, the complainant must also file a copy of the complaint with the municipal clerk.

[Step 2. The Public Body's Response](#)

Upon receipt, the chair of the public body should distribute copies of the complaint to the members of the public body for their review. The public body has 14 business days from the date of receipt to review the complainant's allegations; take remedial action if appropriate; notify the complainant of the remedial action; and forward a copy of the complaint and description of the remedial action taken to the AGO. The public body may request additional information from the complainant. The public body may

also request an extension of time to respond to the complaint. A request for an extension should be made within 14 business days of receipt of the complaint by the public body. The request for an extension should be made in writing to the Division of Open Government, and should state the reason for the requested extension.

Step 3. Filing a Complaint with the Attorney General's Office

A complaint is ripe for review by the AGO 30 days after the complaint is filed with the public body. This 30-day period is intended to provide a reasonable opportunity for the complainant and the public body to resolve the initial complaint. It is important to note that complaints are *not* automatically treated as filed for review by the AGO upon filing with the public body. A complainant who has filed a complaint with a public body, and seeks further review by the Division of Open Government, must file the complaint with the AGO after the 30-day local review period has elapsed but before 90 days have passed since the date of the violation. When filing the complaint with the AGO, the complainant must include a copy of the original complaint and may include any other materials the complainant feels are relevant, including an explanation of why the complainant is not satisfied with the remedial action taken by the public body. Complaints filed with the AGO are public records.

The AGO will review the complaint and any remedial action taken by the public body. The AGO may request additional information from both the complainant and the public body. The AGO will seek to resolve complaints in a reasonable period of time, generally within 90 days of the complaint becoming ripe for review by our office. The AGO may decline to investigate a complaint where more than 90 days have passed since the date of the alleged violation.

When is a violation of the law considered "intentional"?

The Attorney General may, upon finding a violation of the Open Meeting Law, impose a civil penalty upon a public body of not more than \$1,000 for each intentional violation. G.L. c. 30A, § 23(c)(4). An "intentional violation" is an act or omission by a public body or public body member in knowing violation of the Open Meeting Law. G.L. c. 30A, § 18. In determining whether or not a violation was intentional, the Attorney General will consider, among other things, whether the public body or public body member 1) acted with specific intent to violate the law; 2) acted with deliberate ignorance of the law's requirements; or 3) was previously informed by a court decision or advised by the Attorney General that the conduct at issue violated the Open Meeting Law. 940 CMR 29.02. If a public body or public body member made a good faith attempt at compliance with the law, but was reasonably mistaken about its requirements or, after full disclosure, acted in good faith compliance with the advice of counsel, its conduct will not be considered an intentional violation of the Law. G.L.c. 30A, § 23(e); 940 CMR 29.02.

Will the Attorney General's Office provide training on the Open Meeting Law?

The Open Meeting Law directs the AGO to create educational materials and provide training to public bodies to foster awareness of and compliance with the Open Meeting

Law. The AGO has established an Open Meeting Law website, www.mass.gov/ago/openmeeting, on which government officials and members of public bodies can find the statute, regulations, FAQs, training materials, the Attorney General's determination letters resolving complaints, and other resources. The AGO will provide regional trainings for members of public bodies, in addition to offering a free online training video.

Contacting the Attorney General

If you have any questions about the Open Meeting Law or anything contained in this guide, please contact the AGO's Division of Open Government. The AGO also welcomes any comments, feedback, or suggestions you may have about the Open Meeting Law or this guide.

Division of Open Government
Office of the Attorney General
One Ashburton Place
Boston, MA 02108
Tel: 617-963-2540
www.mass.gov/ago/openmeeting
OpenMeeting@state.ma.us

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
OPEN MEETING LAW, G.L. c. 30A, §§18-25

* * *

Chapter 28 of the Acts of 2009, sections 17-20, repealed the existing state Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §§ 11A, 11A-1/2, county Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 34, §§9F, 9G, and municipal Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 39, §§ 23A, 23B, and 23C, and replaced them with a single Open Meeting Law covering all public bodies, G.L. c. 30A, §§ 18-25, enforced by the Attorney General.

* * *

Section 18: [DEFINITIONS]

As used in this section and sections 19 to 25, inclusive, the following words shall, unless the context clearly requires otherwise, have the following meanings:

"Deliberation", an oral or written communication through any medium, including electronic mail, between or among a quorum of a public body on any public business within its jurisdiction; provided, however, that "deliberation" shall not include the distribution of a meeting agenda, scheduling information or distribution of other procedural meeting or the distribution of reports or documents that may be discussed at a meeting, provided that no opinion of a member is expressed.

"Emergency", a sudden, generally unexpected occurrence or set of circumstances demanding immediate action.

"Executive session", any part of a meeting of a public body closed to the public for deliberation of certain matters.

"Intentional violation", an act or omission by a public body or a member thereof, in knowing violation of the open meeting law.

"Meeting", a deliberation by a public body with respect to any matter within the body's jurisdiction; provided, however, "meeting" shall not include:

- (a) an on-site inspection of a project or program, so long as the members do not deliberate;
- (b) attendance by a quorum of a public body at a public or private gathering, including a conference or training program or a media, social or other event, so long as the members do not deliberate;
- (c) attendance by a quorum of a public body at a meeting of another public body that has complied with the notice requirements of the open meeting law, so long as the visiting members communicate only by open participation in the meeting on those matters under discussion by the host body and do not deliberate;
- (d) a meeting of a quasi-judicial board or commission held for the sole purpose of making a decision required in an adjudicatory proceeding brought before it; or
- (e) a session of a town meeting convened under section 9 of chapter 39 which would include the attendance by a quorum of a public body at any such session.

"Minutes", the written report of a meeting created by a public body required by subsection (a) of section 22 and section 5A of chapter 66.

"Open meeting law", sections 18 to 25, inclusive.

"Post notice", to display conspicuously the written announcement of a meeting either in hard copy or electronic format.

"Preliminary screening", the initial stage of screening applicants conducted by a committee or subcommittee of a public body solely for the purpose of providing to the public body a list of those applicants qualified for further consideration or interview.

"Public body", a multiple-member board, commission, committee or subcommittee within the executive or legislative branch or within any county, district, city, region or town, however created, elected, appointed or otherwise constituted, established to serve a public purpose; provided, however, that the governing board of a local housing, redevelopment or other similar authority shall be deemed a local public body; provided, further, that the governing board or body of any other authority established by the general court to serve a public purpose in the commonwealth or any part thereof shall be deemed a state public body; provided, further, that "public body" shall not include the general court or the committees or recess commissions thereof, bodies of the judicial branch or bodies appointed by a constitutional officer solely for the purpose of advising a constitutional officer and shall not include the board of bank incorporation or the policyholders protective board; and provided further, that a subcommittee shall include any multiple-member body created to advise or make recommendations to a public body.

"Quorum", a simple majority of the members of the public body, unless otherwise provided in a general or special law, executive order or other authorizing provision.

Section 19. [Division of Open Government; Open Meeting Law Training; Open Meeting Law Advisory Commission; Annual Report]

(a) There shall be in the department of the attorney general a division of open government under the direction of a director of open government. The attorney general shall designate an assistant attorney general as the director of the open government division. The director may appoint and remove, subject to the approval of the attorney general, such expert, clerical and other assistants as the work of the division may require. The division shall perform the duties imposed upon the attorney general by the open meeting law, which may include participating, appearing and intervening in any administrative and judicial proceedings pertaining to the enforcement of the open meeting law. For the purpose of such participation, appearance, intervention and training authorized by this chapter the attorney general may expend such funds as may be appropriated therefor.

(b) The attorney general shall create and distribute educational materials and provide training to public bodies in order to foster awareness and compliance with the open meeting law. Open meeting law training may include, but shall not be limited to, instruction in:

- (1) the general background of the legal requirements for the open meeting law;
- (2) applicability of sections 18 to 25, inclusive, to governmental bodies;
- (3) the role of the attorney general in enforcing the open meeting law; and
- (4) penalties and other consequences for failure to comply with this chapter.

(c) There shall be an open meeting law advisory commission. The commission shall consist of 5 members, 2 of whom shall be the chairmen of the joint committee on state administration and regulatory oversight; 1 of whom shall be the president of the Massachusetts Municipal Association or his designee; 1 of whom shall be the president of the Massachusetts Newspaper Publishers Association or his designee; and 1 of whom shall be the attorney general or his designee.

The commission shall review issues relative to the open meeting law and shall submit to the attorney general recommendations for changes to the regulations, trainings, and educational initiatives relative to the open meeting law as it deems necessary and appropriate.

(d) The attorney general shall, not later than January 31, file annually with the commission a report providing information on the enforcement of the open meeting law during the preceding calendar year. The report shall include, but not be limited to:

- (1) the number of open meeting law complaints received by the attorney general;
- (2) the number of hearings convened as the result of open meeting law complaints by the attorney general;
- (3) a summary of the determinations of violations made by the attorney general;
- (4) a summary of the orders issued as the result of the determination of an open meeting law violation by the attorney general;
- (5) an accounting of the fines obtained by the attorney general as the result of open meeting law enforcement actions;
- (6) the number of actions filed in superior court seeking relief from an order of the attorney general; and
- (7) any additional information relevant to the administration and enforcement of the open meeting law that the attorney general deems appropriate.

Section 20. [Meetings of a Public Body to be Open to the Public; Notice of Meeting; Remote Participation; Recording and Transmission of Meeting; Removal of Persons for Disruption of Proceedings]

(a) Except as provided in section 21, all meetings of a public body shall be open to the public.

(b) Except in an emergency, in addition to any notice otherwise required by law, a public body shall post notice of every meeting at least 48 hours prior to such meeting, excluding Saturdays, Sundays and legal holidays. In an emergency, a public body shall post notice as soon as reasonably possible prior to such meeting. Notice shall be printed in a legible, easily understandable format and shall contain the date, time and place of such meeting and a listing of topics that the chair reasonably anticipates will be discussed at the meeting.

(c) For meetings of a local public body, notice shall be filed with the municipal clerk and posted in a manner conspicuously visible to the public at all hours in or on the municipal building in which the clerk's office is located.

For meetings of a regional or district public body, notice shall be filed and posted in each city or town within the region or district in the manner prescribed for local public bodies. For meetings of a regional school district, the secretary of the regional school district committee shall be considered to be its clerk and shall file notice with the clerk of each city or town within such district and shall post the notice in the manner prescribed for local public bodies. For meetings of a county public body, notice shall be filed in the office of the county commissioners and a copy of the notice shall be publicly posted in a manner conspicuously visible to the public at all hours in such place or places as the county commissioners shall designate for the purpose.

For meetings of a state public body, notice shall be filed with the attorney general by posting on a website in accordance with procedures established for this purpose and a duplicate copy of the notice shall be filed with the regulations division of the state secretary's office.

The attorney general shall have the authority to prescribe or approve alternative methods of notice where the attorney general determines such alternative will afford more effective notice to the public.

(d) The attorney general may by regulation or letter ruling, authorize remote participation by members of a public body not present at the meeting location; provided, however, that the absent members and all persons present at the meeting location are clearly audible to each other; and provided, further, that a quorum of the body, including the chair, are present at the meeting location. Such authorized members may vote and shall not be deemed absent for the purposes of section 23D of chapter 39.

(e) After notifying the chair of the public body, any person may make a video or audio recording of an open session of a meeting of a public body, or may transmit the meeting through any medium, subject to reasonable requirements of the chair as to the number, placement and operation of equipment used so as not to interfere with the conduct of the meeting. At the beginning of the meeting the chair shall inform other attendees of any such recordings.

(f) No person shall address a meeting of a public body without permission of the chair, and all persons shall, at the request of the chair, be silent. No person shall disrupt the proceedings of a meeting of a public body. If, after clear warning from the chair, a person continues to disrupt the proceedings, the chair may order the person to withdraw from the meeting and if the person does not withdraw, the chair may authorize a constable or other officer to remove the person from the meeting.

(g) Within 2 weeks of qualification for office, all persons serving on a public body shall certify, on a form prescribed by the attorney general, the receipt of a copy of the open meeting law, regulations promulgated pursuant to section 25 and a copy of the educational materials prepared by the attorney general explaining the open meeting law and its application pursuant to section 19. Unless otherwise directed or approved by the attorney general, the appointing authority, city or town clerk or the executive director or other appropriate administrator of a state or regional body, or their designees, shall obtain such certification from each person

upon entering service and shall retain it subject to the applicable records retention schedule where the body maintains its official records. The certification shall be evidence that the member of a public body has read and understands the requirements of the open meeting law and the consequences of violating it.

Section 21. [EXECUTIVE SESSIONS]

(a) A public body may meet in executive session only for the following purposes:

1. To discuss the reputation, character, physical condition or mental health, rather than professional competence, of an individual, or to discuss the discipline or dismissal of, or complaints or charges brought against, a public officer, employee, staff member or individual. The individual to be discussed in such executive session shall be notified in writing by the public body at least 48 hours prior to the proposed executive session; provided, however, that notification may be waived upon written agreement of the parties. A public body shall hold an open session if the individual involved requests that the session be open. If an executive session is held, such individual shall have the following rights:
 - i. to be present at such executive session during deliberations which involve that individual;
 - ii. to have counsel or a representative of his own choosing present and attending for the purpose of advising the individual and not for the purpose of active participation in the executive session;
 - iii. to speak on his own behalf; and
 - iv. to cause an independent record to be created of said executive session by audio-recording or transcription, at the individual's expense.

The rights of an individual set forth in this paragraph are in addition to the rights that he may have from any other source, including, but not limited to, rights under any laws or collective bargaining agreements and the exercise or non-exercise of the individual rights under this section shall not be construed as a waiver of any rights of the individual.

2. To conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel;
3. To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares;
4. To discuss the deployment of security personnel or devices, or strategies with respect thereto;
5. To investigate charges of criminal misconduct or to consider the filing of criminal complaints;
6. To consider the purchase, exchange, lease or value of real property if the chair declares that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position of the public body;
7. To comply with, or act under the authority of, any general or special law or federal grant-in-aid requirements;
8. To consider or interview applicants for employment or appointment by a preliminary screening committee if the chair declares that an open meeting will have a detrimental effect in obtaining qualified applicants; provided, however, that this clause shall not apply to any meeting, including meetings of a preliminary screening committee, to consider and interview applicants who have passed a prior preliminary screening;
9. To meet or confer with a mediator, as defined in section 23C of chapter 233, with respect to any litigation

or decision on any public business within its jurisdiction involving another party, group or entity, provided that:

- (i) any decision to participate in mediation shall be made in an open session and the parties, issues involved and purpose of the mediation shall be disclosed; and
- (ii) no action shall be taken by any public body with respect to those issues which are the subject of the mediation without deliberation and approval for such action at an open session; or

10. To discuss trade secrets or confidential, competitively-sensitive or other proprietary information provided in the course of activities conducted by a governmental body as an energy supplier under a license granted by the department of public utilities pursuant to section 1F of chapter 164, in the course of activities conducted as a municipal aggregator under section 134 of said chapter 164 or in the course of activities conducted by a cooperative consisting of governmental entities organized pursuant to section 136 of said chapter 164, when such governmental body, municipal aggregator or cooperative determines that such disclosure will adversely affect its ability to conduct business in relation to other entities making, selling or distributing electric power and energy.

(b) A public body may meet in closed session for 1 or more of the purposes enumerated in subsection

(a) provided that:

1. the body has first convened in an open session pursuant to section 21;
2. a majority of members of the body have voted to go into executive session and the vote of each member is recorded by roll call and entered into the minutes;
3. before the executive session, the chair shall state the purpose for the executive session, stating all subjects that may be revealed without compromising the purpose for which the executive session was called;
4. the chair shall publicly announce whether the open session will reconvene at the conclusion of the executive session; and
5. accurate records of the executive session shall be maintained pursuant to section 23.

Section 22. [Meeting Minutes; Records]

(a) A public body shall create and maintain accurate minutes of all meetings, including executive sessions, setting forth the date, time and place, the members present or absent, a summary of the discussions on each subject, a list of documents and other exhibits used at the meeting, the decisions made and the actions taken at each meeting, including the record of all votes.

(b) No vote taken at an open session shall be by secret ballot. Any vote taken at an executive session shall be recorded by roll call and entered into the minutes.

(c) Minutes of all open sessions shall be created and approved in a timely manner. The minutes of an open session, if they exist and whether approved or in draft form, shall be made available upon request by any person within 10 days.

(d) Documents and other exhibits, such as photographs, recordings or maps, used by the body at an open or executive session shall, along with the minutes, be part of the official record of the session.

(e) The minutes of any open session, the notes, recordings or other materials used in the preparation of such minutes and all documents and exhibits used at the session, shall be public records in their entirety and not exempt from disclosure pursuant to any of the exemptions under clause Twenty-sixth of section 7 of chapter 4. Notwithstanding this paragraph, the following materials shall be exempt from disclosure to the public as personnel information: (1) materials used in a performance evaluation of an individual bearing on his professional competence, provided they were not created by the members of the body for the purposes of the evaluation; and (2) materials used in deliberations about employment or appointment of individuals, including applications and supporting materials; provided, however, that any resume submitted by an applicant shall not be exempt.

(f) The minutes of any executive session, the notes, recordings or other materials used in the preparation of such minutes and all documents and exhibits used at the session, may be withheld from disclosure to the public in their entirety under subclause (a) of clause Twenty-sixth of section 7 of chapter 4, as long as publication may defeat the lawful purposes of the executive session, but no longer; provided, however, that the executive session was held in compliance with section 21.

When the purpose for which a valid executive session was held has been served, the minutes, preparatory materials and documents and exhibits of the session shall be disclosed unless the attorney-client privilege or 1 or more of the exemptions under said clause Twenty-sixth of said section 7 of said chapter 4 apply to withhold these records, or any portion thereof, from disclosure.

For purposes of this subsection, if an executive session is held pursuant to clause (2) or (3) of subsections (a) of section 21, then the minutes, preparatory materials and documents and exhibits used at the session may be withheld from disclosure to the public in their entirety, unless and until such time as a litigating, negotiating or bargaining position is no longer jeopardized by such disclosure, at which time they shall be disclosed unless the attorney-client privilege or 1 or more of the exemptions under said clause Twenty-sixth of said section 7 of said chapter 4 apply to withhold these records, or any portion thereof, from disclosure.

(g)(1) The public body, or its chair or designee, shall, at reasonable intervals, review the minutes of executive sessions to determine if the provisions of this subsection warrant continued non-disclosure. Such determination shall be announced at the body's next meeting and such announcement shall be included in the minutes of that meeting.

(2) Upon request by any person to inspect or copy the minutes of an executive session or any portion thereof, the body shall respond to the request within 10 days following receipt and shall release any such minutes not covered by an exemption under subsection (f); provided, however, that if the body has not performed a review pursuant to paragraph (1), the public body shall perform the review and release the non-exempt minutes, or any portion thereof, not later than the body's next meeting or 30 days, whichever first occurs. A public body shall not assess a fee for the time spent in its review.

Section 23. [Enforcement of Open Meeting Law; Complaints; Hearings; Civil Actions]

(a) Subject to appropriation, the attorney general shall interpret and enforce the open meeting law.

(b) At least 30 days prior to the filing of a complaint with the attorney general, the complainant shall file a written complaint with the public body, setting forth the circumstances which constitute the alleged violation and giving the body an opportunity to remedy the alleged violation; provided, however, that such complaint shall be filed within 30 days of the date of the alleged violation. The public body shall, within 14 business days of receipt of a complaint, send a copy of the complaint to the attorney general and notify the attorney general of any remedial action taken. Any remedial action taken by the public body in response to a complaint under this subsection shall not be admissible as evidence against the public body that a violation occurred in any later administrative or judicial proceeding relating to such alleged violation. The attorney general may authorize an extension of time to the public body for the purpose of taking remedial action upon the written request of the public body and a showing of good cause to grant the extension.

(c) Upon the receipt of a complaint by any person, the attorney general shall determine, in a timely manner, whether there has been a violation of the open meeting law. The attorney general may, and before imposing any civil penalty on a public body shall, hold a hearing on any such complaint. Following a determination that a violation has occurred, the attorney general shall determine whether the public body, 1 or more of the members, or both, are responsible and whether the violation was intentional or unintentional. Upon the finding of a violation, the attorney general may issue an order to:

- (1) compel immediate and future compliance with the open meeting law;
- (2) compel attendance at a training session authorized by the attorney general;
- (3) nullify in whole or in part any action taken at the meeting;
- (4) impose a civil penalty upon the public body of not more than \$1,000 for each intentional violation;
- (5) reinstate an employee without loss of compensation, seniority, tenure or other benefits;
- (6) compel that minutes, records or other materials be made public; or
- (7) prescribe other appropriate action.

(d) A public body or any member of a body aggrieved by any order issued pursuant to this section may, notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, obtain judicial review of the order only through an action in superior court seeking relief in the nature of certiorari; provided, however, that notwithstanding section 4 of chapter 249, any such action shall be commenced in superior court within 21 days of receipt of the order. Any order issued under this section shall be stayed pending judicial review; provided, however, that if the order nullifies an action of the public body, the body shall not implement such action pending judicial review.

(e) If any public body or member thereof shall fail to comply with the requirements set forth in any order issued by the attorney general, or shall fail to pay any civil penalty imposed within 21 days of the date of issuance of such order or within 30 days following the decision of the superior court if judicial review of such order has been timely sought, the attorney general may file an action to compel compliance. Such action shall be filed in Suffolk superior court with respect to state public bodies and, with respect to all other public bodies, in the superior court in any county in which the public body acts or meets. If such body or member

has not timely sought judicial review of the order, such order shall not be open to review in an action to compel compliance.

(f) As an alternative to the procedure in subsection (b), the attorney general or 3 or more registered voters may initiate a civil action to enforce the open meeting law.

Any action under this subsection shall be filed in Suffolk superior court with respect to state public bodies and, with respect to all other public bodies, in the superior court in any county in which the public body acts or meets.

In any action filed pursuant to this subsection, in addition to all other remedies available to the superior court, in law or in equity, the court shall have all of the remedies set forth in subsection (c).

In any action filed under this subsection, the order of notice on the complaint shall be returnable not later than 10 days after the filing and the complaint shall be heard and determined on the return day or on such day as the court shall fix, having regard to the speediest possible determination of the cause consistent with the rights of the parties; provided, however, that orders may be issued at any time on or after the filing of the complaint without notice when such order is necessary to fulfill the purposes of the open meeting law. In the hearing of any action under this subsection, the burden shall be on the respondent to show by a preponderance of the evidence that the action complained of in such complaint was in accordance with and authorized by the open meeting law; provided, however, that no civil penalty may be imposed on an individual absent proof that the action complained of violated the open meeting law.

(g) It shall be a defense to the imposition of a penalty that the public body, after full disclosure, acted in good faith compliance with the advice of the public body's legal counsel.

(h) Payment of civil penalties under this section paid to or received by the attorney general shall be paid into the general fund of the commonwealth.

Section 24. [Investigation by Attorney General of Violations of Open Meeting Law]

(a) Whenever the attorney general has reasonable cause to believe that a person, including any public body and any other state, regional, county, municipal or other governmental official or entity, has violated the open meeting law, the attorney general may conduct an investigation to ascertain whether in fact such person has violated the open meeting law. Upon notification of an investigation, any person, public body or any other state, regional, county, municipal or other governmental official or entity who is the subject of an investigation, shall make all information necessary to conduct such investigation available to the attorney general. In the event that the person, public body or any other state, regional, county, municipal or other governmental official or entity being investigated does not voluntarily provide relevant information to the attorney general within 30 days of receiving notice of the investigation, the attorney general may: (1) take testimony under oath concerning such alleged violation of the open meeting law; (2) examine or cause to be examined any documentary material of whatever nature relevant to such alleged violation of the open meeting law; and (3) require attendance during such examination of documentary material of any person having knowledge of the documentary material and take testimony under oath or acknowledgment in respect of any such documentary material. Such testimony and examination shall take place in the county where

such person resides or has a place of business or, if the parties consent or such person is a nonresident or has no place of business within the commonwealth, in Suffolk county.

(b) Notice of the time, place and cause of such taking of testimony, examination or attendance shall be given by the attorney general at least 10 days prior to the date of such taking of testimony or examination.

(c) Service of any such notice may be made by: (1) delivering a duly-executed copy to the person to be served or to a partner or to any officer or agent authorized by appointment or by law to receive service of process on behalf of such person; (2) delivering a duly-executed copy to the principal place of business in the commonwealth of the person to be served; or (3) mailing by registered or certified mail a duly-executed copy addressed to the person to be served at the principal place of business in the commonwealth or, if said person has no place of business in the commonwealth, to his principal office or place of business.

(d) Each such notice shall: (1) state the time and place for the taking of testimony or the examination and the name and address of each person to be examined, if known and, if the name is not known, a general description sufficient to identify him or the particular class or group to which he belongs; (2) state the statute and section thereof, the alleged violation of which is under investigation and the general subject matter of the investigation; (3) describe the class or classes of documentary material to be produced thereunder with reasonable specificity, so as fairly to indicate the material demanded; (4) prescribe a return date within which the documentary material is to be produced; and (5) identify the members of the attorney general's staff to whom such documentary material is to be made available for inspection and copying.

(e) No such notice shall contain any requirement which would be unreasonable or improper if contained in a subpoena duces tecum issued by a court of the commonwealth or require the disclosure of any documentary material which would be privileged, or which for any other reason would not be required by a subpoena duces tecum issued by a court of the commonwealth.

(f) Any documentary material or other information produced by any person pursuant to this section shall not, unless otherwise ordered by a court of the commonwealth for good cause shown, be disclosed to any person other than the authorized agent or representative of the attorney general, unless with the consent of the person producing the same; provided, however, that such material or information may be disclosed by the attorney general in court pleadings or other papers filed in court.

(g) At any time prior to the date specified in the notice, or within 21 days after the notice has been served, whichever period is shorter, the court may, upon motion for good cause shown, extend such reporting date or modify or set aside such demand or grant a protective order in accordance with the standards set forth in Rule 26(c) of the Massachusetts Rules of Civil Procedure. The motion may be filed in the superior court of the county in which the person served resides or has his usual place of business or in Suffolk county. This section shall not be applicable to any criminal proceeding nor shall information obtained under the authority of this section be admissible in evidence in any criminal prosecution for substantially identical transactions.

Section 25. [REGULATIONS, LETTER RULINGS, ADVISORY OPINIONS]

(a) The attorney general shall have the authority to promulgate rules and regulations to carry out enforcement of the open meeting law.

(b) The attorney general shall have the authority to interpret the open meeting law and to issue written letter rulings or advisory opinions according to rules established under this section.

CERTIFICATE OF RECEIPT OF OPEN MEETING LAW MATERIALS

I, _____, who qualified for the office of
(Name)

_____, on _____, certify pursuant
(Office) (Date)

to G.L. c. 30A, § 20(b), that I have received copies of the following Open Meeting Law

materials:

- 1) the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §§ 18-25;
- 2) regulations promulgated by the Attorney General under G.L. c. 30A, § 25; and
- 3) educational materials promulgated by the Attorney General under G.L. c. 30A, § 19(b), explaining the Open Meeting Law and its application.

I have read and understand the requirements of the Open Meeting Law and the consequences for violating it. I further understand that the materials I have received may be revised or updated from time to time, and that I have a continuing obligation to implement any changes in the Open Meeting Law during my term of office.

(Name)

(Name of Public Body)

(Date)

Pursuant to G.L. c. 30A, § 20(g), an executed copy of this certificate shall be retained, according to the relevant records retention schedule, by the appointing authority, city or town clerk, or the executive director or other appropriate administrator of a state or regional body, or their designee.

Tab 2



The Official Website of the Attorney General of Massachusetts

Attorney General Martha Coakley

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940 CMR 29.00: Open Meetings

Open Meetings

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29.01: Purpose, Scope and Other General Provisions

- (1) Authority . The Attorney General promulgates 940 CMR 29.00, relating to the Open Meeting Law, pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 25 (a) and (b).
- (2) Purpose . The purpose of 940 CMR 29.00 is to interpret, enforce and effectuate the purposes of the Open Meeting Law, M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25.
- (3) Severability . If any provision of 940 CMR 29.00 or the application of such provision to any person, public body, or circumstances shall be held invalid, the validity of the remainder of 940 CMR 29.00 and the applicability of such provision to other persons, public bodies, or circumstances shall not be affected thereby
- (4) Mailing . All complaints, notices (except meeting notices) and other materials that must be sent to another party shall be sent by one of the following means: first class mail, email, hand delivery, or by any other means at least as expeditious as first class mail.

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29.02: Definitions

As used in 940 CMR 29.00, the following terms shall, unless the context clearly requires otherwise, have the following meanings:

Commission means the Open Meeting Law Advisory Commission, as defined by G.L. c. 30A, sec. 19(c).

District Public Body means a public body with jurisdiction that extends to two or more municipalities.

Emergency means a sudden, generally unexpected occurrence or set of circumstances demanding immediate action.

Intentional Violation means an act or omission by a public body or a member thereof, in knowing violation of M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25. Evidence of an intentional violation of M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25 shall include, but not be limited to, that the public body or public body member (a) acted with specific intent to violate the law; (b) acted with deliberate ignorance of the law's requirements; or (c) was previously informed by receipt of a decision from a court of competent jurisdiction or advised by the Attorney General, pursuant to 940 CMR 29.07 or 940 CMR 29.08, that the conduct violates M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25. Where a public body or public body member has made a good faith attempt at compliance with the law, but was reasonably mistaken about its requirements or, after full disclosure, acted in good faith compliance with the advice of the public body's legal counsel, such conduct will not be considered an intentional violation of M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25.

Person means all individuals and entities, including governmental officials and employees. Person does not include public bodies.

Post notice means to place a written announcement of a meeting on a bulletin board, electronic display, website, cable television channel, newspaper or in a loose-leaf binder in a manner conspicuously visible to the public, including persons with disabilities, at all hours, in accordance with 940 CMR 29.03.

Public body has the identical meaning as set forth in M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18, that is, a multiple-member board, commission, committee or subcommittee within the executive or legislative branch or within any county, district, city, region or town,

however created, elected, appointed or otherwise constituted, established to serve a public purpose; provided, however, that the governing board of a local housing, redevelopment or similar authority shall be deemed a local public body.

provided, further, that the governing board or body of any other authority established by the general court to serve a public purpose in the commonwealth or any part thereof shall be deemed a state public body; provided, further, that "public body" shall not include the general court or the committees or recess commissions thereof, bodies of the judicial branch or bodies appointed by a constitutional officer solely for the purpose of advising a constitutional officer and shall not include the board of bank incorporation or the policyholders protective board; and provided, further, that a subcommittee shall include any multiple-member body created to advise or make recommendations to a public body.

Qualification for Office means the election or appointment of a person to a public body and the taking of the oath of office, where required, and shall include qualification for a second or any subsequent term of office. Where no term of office for a member of a public body is specified, the member shall be deemed to be qualified for office on a biannual basis on January 1st of a calendar year beginning on January 1, 2011. Where a member's term of office began prior to July 1, 2010, and will not expire until after July 1, 2011, the member shall be deemed to have qualified for office on January 1, 2011.

Remote Participation means participation by a member of a public body during a meeting of that public body where the member is not physically present at the meeting location.

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29.03: Notice Posting Requirements

(1) Requirements Applicable to All Public Bodies

(a) Except in an emergency, public bodies shall file meeting notices sufficiently in advance of a public meeting to permit posting of the notice at least 48 hours in advance of the public meeting, excluding Saturdays, Sundays and legal holidays, in accordance with M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 20. In an emergency, the notice shall be posted as soon as reasonably possible prior to such meeting

(b) Meeting notices shall be printed or displayed in a legible, easily understandable format and shall contain the date, time and place of such meeting and a listing of topics that the chair reasonably anticipates will be discussed at the meeting. The list of topics shall have sufficient specificity to reasonably advise the public of the issues to be discussed at the meeting. The date and time that the notice is posted shall be conspicuously recorded thereon or therewith.

(c) Notices posted under an alternative posting method authorized by 940 CMR 29.03(2)-(5) shall include the same content as required by 940 CMR 29.03(1)(b). If such an alternative posting method is adopted, the municipal clerk, in the case of a municipality, or the body, in all other cases, shall file with the Attorney General written notice of adoption of the alternative method, including the website address where applicable, and any change thereto, and the most current notice posting method on file with the Attorney General shall be consistently used

(2) Requirements Specific to Local Public Bodies

(a) The municipal clerk, or other person designated by agreement with the municipal clerk, shall post notice of the meeting in a manner conspicuously visible to the public at all hours in or on the municipal building in which the clerk's office is located. Such notice shall be accessible to the public in the municipal clerk's office. If such notice is not conspicuously visible to the public during hours when the clerk's office is closed, such notice shall also be made available through an alternative method prescribed or approved by the Attorney General under 940 CMR 29.03(2)

(b) A description of such alternative method, sufficient to allow members of the public to obtain notice through such method, shall be posted in a manner conspicuously visible to the public at all hours on or adjacent to the main and handicapped accessible entrances to the municipal building in which the clerk's office is located.

(b) For local public bodies, the Attorney General has determined, pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 20(c), that the following alternative methods will provide more effective notice to the public:

- a. Public bodies may post notice of meetings on the municipal website;
- b. Public bodies may post notice of meetings on cable television, AND, post notice or provide cable television access in an alternate municipal building (e.g., police or fire station) where the notice is accessible at all hours;
- c. Public bodies may post notice of meetings in a newspaper of general circulation in the municipality, AND, post notice or a copy of the newspaper containing the meeting notice at an alternate municipal building (e.g., police or fire station) where the notice is accessible at all hours;
- d. Public bodies may place a computer monitor or electronic or physical bulletin board displaying meeting notices on or in a door, window, or near the entrance of the municipal building in which the clerk's office is located in such a manner as to be visible to the public from outside the building, or;
- e. Public bodies may provide an audio recording of meeting notices, available to the public by telephone at all hours.

(3) Requirements Specific to Regional or District Public Bodies

- (a) Notice shall be filed and posted in each city and town within the region or district in the manner prescribed for local public bodies in that city or town.
- (b) As an alternative method of notice, a regional or district public body may post a meeting notice on the regional or district public body's website. A copy of the notice shall be filed and kept by the chair of the public body or the chair's designee.

(4) Requirements Specific to Regional School Districts.

- (a) The secretary of the regional school district committee shall be considered to be its clerk. The clerk of the regional school district shall file notice with the municipal clerk of each city and town within such district and each such municipal clerk shall post the notice in the manner prescribed for local public bodies in that city or town.
- (b) As an alternative method of notice, a regional school district committee may post a meeting notice on the regional school district's website. A copy of the notice shall be filed and kept by the secretary of the regional school district committee or the secretary's designee.

(5) Requirements Specific to County Public Bodies.

- (a) Notice shall be filed and posted in the office of the county commissioners and a copy of the notice shall be publicly posted in a manner conspicuously visible to the public at all hours in such place or places as the county commissioners shall designate for this purpose.
- (b) As an alternative method of notice, a county public body may post a meeting on the county public body's website. A copy of the notice shall be filed and kept by the chair of the county public body or the chair's designee.
- (c) Requirements Specific to State Public Bodies. Notice shall be posted on a website in accordance with procedures established by the Attorney General in consultation with the Information Technology Division of the Executive Office for Administration and Finance for the purpose of providing the public with effective notice. A copy of each notice shall also be sent by first class or electronic mail to the Secretary of State's Regulations Division. The chair of each state public body shall notify the Attorney General in writing of its Internet notice posting location and any change thereto. The public body shall consistently use the most current notice posting method on file with the Attorney General.

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29.04: Certification

- (1) For local public bodies, a document including M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25; a document including 940 CMR 29.00; and educational materials prepared by the Attorney General explaining M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25, and its application, shall be delivered by the municipal clerk to each member of a public body, whether elected or appointed, upon taking the oath of office, if required, and in every case before entering into performance of the office. Within two weeks after receipt of such materials, the member shall certify, on the form prescribed by the Attorney General, receipt of such materials. The municipal clerk shall maintain the signed certification for each such person, indicating the date the person received the materials.

- (2) For regional, district, county or state public bodies, a document including M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25; a document including 940 CMR 29.00; and educational materials prepared by the Attorney General explaining M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25, and its application, shall be delivered by the appointing authority, executive director or other appropriate administrator or their designees, to each member of a public body, whether elected or appointed, upon taking the oath of office, if required, and in every case before entering into the performance of the office. Within two weeks after receipt of such materials, the member shall certify, on the form prescribed by the Attorney General, receipt of such materials. The appointing authority, executive director or other appropriate administrator, or their designees, shall maintain the signed certification for each such person, indicating the date the person received the materials.

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29.05: Complaints

- (1) All complaints shall be in writing, using the form approved by the Attorney General and available on the Attorney General's website. A public body need not, and the Attorney General will not, investigate or address anonymous complaints.
- (2) Public bodies, or the municipal clerk in the case of a local public body, should provide any person, on request, with an Open Meeting Law complaint form. If a paper copy is unavailable, then the public body should direct the requesting party to the Attorney General's website, where an electronic copy of the form will be available for downloading and printing.
- (3) For local public bodies, the complainant shall file the complaint with the chair of the public body, who shall disseminate copies of the complaint to the members of the public body. The complainant shall also file a copy of the complaint with the municipal clerk, who shall keep such filings in an orderly fashion for public review on request during regular business hours. For all other public bodies, the complainant shall file the complaint with the chair of the relevant public body, or if there is no chair, then with the public body. The complaint shall be filed within 30 days of the alleged

violation of M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25, or if the alleged violation of M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25, could not reasonably have been known at the time it occurred, then within 30 days of the date it should reasonably have been discovered.

(4) The public body shall review timely complaints to ascertain the time, date, place and circumstances which constitute the alleged violation. If the public body needs additional information to resolve the complaint, then the chair may request it from the complainant within seven business days of receiving the complaint. The complainant shall respond within 10 business days after he or she receives the request. The public body will then have an additional 10 business days after receiving the complainant's response to review the complaint and take any remedial action pursuant to 940 CMR 29.05(5)..

(5) Within 14 business days after receiving the complaint, unless an extension has been granted by the Attorney General as provided in 940 CMR 29.05(5)(a) and (b), the public body shall review the complaint's allegations, take remedial action, if appropriate, and send to the Attorney General a copy of the complaint and a description of any remedial action taken. The public body shall simultaneously notify the complainant that it has sent such materials to the Attorney General and shall provide the complainant with a copy of the description of any remedial action taken.

(a) Any remedial action taken by the public body in response to a complaint under 940 CMR 29.05(5) shall not be admissible as evidence that a violation occurred in any later administrative or judicial proceeding against the public body relating to the alleged violation.

(b) If the public body requires additional time to resolve the complaint, it may obtain an extension from the Attorney General by submitting a written request within 14 business days after receiving the complaint. The Attorney General will grant an extension if the request demonstrates good cause. Good cause will generally be found if, for example, the public body cannot meet within the 14 business day period to consider proposed remedial action. The Attorney General shall notify the complainant of any extension and the reason for it.

(e) If at least 30 days have passed after the complaint was filed with the public body, and if the complainant is unsatisfied with the public body's resolution of the complaint, the complainant may file a complaint with the Attorney General. When filing a complaint with the Attorney General, the complainant shall include a copy of the original complaint along with any other materials the complainant believes are relevant. The Attorney General may decline to investigate complaints filed with the Attorney General more than 90 days after the alleged violation of M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25, unless an extension was granted to the public body or the complainant demonstrates good cause for the delay.

(7) The Attorney General shall acknowledge receipt of all complaints and will resolve them within a reasonable period of time, generally 90 days. If additional time is necessary to resolve a particular complaint, the Attorney General will notify the complainant and the public body.

(8) If a complaint appears untimely, is not in the proper form, or is missing information, the Attorney General shall return the complaint to the complainant within 14 business days of its receipt, noting its deficiencies. The complainant shall then have 14 business days to correct the deficiencies and resubmit the complaint to the Attorney General. If the deficiencies are not corrected, no further action on the complaint will be taken by the Attorney General.

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29.06: Investigation

Whenever the Attorney General has reasonable cause to believe that a violation of M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25, has occurred that has not been adequately remedied, then the Attorney General may conduct an investigation.

(1) The Attorney General shall notify the public body or person that is the subject of a complaint and an investigation of the existence of the investigation within a reasonable period of time. The Attorney General shall also notify the public body or person of the nature of the alleged violation

(2) Upon notice of the investigation, the subject of the investigation shall provide the Attorney General with all information relevant to the investigation. The subject may also submit a memorandum or other writing to the Attorney General, addressing the allegations being investigated.

If the subject of the investigation fails to voluntarily provide the necessary or relevant information within 30 days of receiving notice of the investigation, the Attorney General may issue subpoenas to obtain the information in accordance with M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 24, to:

- (a) Take testimony under oath;
- (b) Examine or cause to be examined any documentary material; or
- (c) Require attendance during such examination of documentary material by any person having knowledge of the documentary material and take testimony under oath or acknowledgment in respect of any such documentary material.

Any documentary material or other information produced by any person pursuant to 940 CMR 29.06 shall not, unless otherwise ordered by a court of the Commonwealth for good cause shown, be disclosed without that person's consent by the Attorney General to any person other than the Attorney General's authorized agent or representative. However, the Attorney General may disclose the material in court pleadings or other papers filed in court, or, to the extent necessary, in an administrative hearing or other action taken to conduct or resolve the investigation pursuant to 940 CMR 29.00.

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29.07: Resolution

(1) No Violation. If the Attorney General determines, after investigation, that the M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25, has not been violated, the Attorney General shall terminate the investigation and notify, in writing, the subject of the investigation and any complainant

(2) Violation Resolved Without Hearing. If the Attorney General determines after investigation that M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25, has been violated, the Attorney General may resolve the investigation without a hearing. The Attorney General shall determine whether the relevant public body, one or more of its members, or both, were responsible, and whether the violation was intentional or unintentional. The Attorney General will notify, in writing, any complainant of the investigation's resolution. Upon finding a violation of M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25, the Attorney General may take one of the following actions:

(a) Informal action. The Attorney General may resolve the investigation with a telephone call, letter or other appropriate form of communication that explains the violation and clarifies the subject's obligations under M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25, providing the subject with a reasonable period of time to comply with any outstanding obligations.

(b) Formal order. The Attorney General may resolve the investigation with a formal order. The order may require:

1. Immediate and future compliance with M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25;
2. Attendance at a training session authorized by the Attorney General;
3. That minutes, records or other materials be made public; or
4. Other appropriate action.

Orders shall be available on the Attorney General's website.

(3) Violation Resolved After Hearing. The Attorney General may conduct a hearing where the Attorney General deems appropriate. The hearing shall be conducted pursuant to 801 CMR 1.00 et seq., as modified by any regulations issued by the Attorney General. At the conclusion of the hearing, the Attorney General shall determine whether a violation of M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25, occurred, whether the public body, one or more of its members, or both, were responsible, and whether the violation was intentional or unintentional. The Attorney General will notify, in writing, any complainant of the investigation's resolution. Upon a finding that a violation occurred, the Attorney General may order:

- (a) Immediate and future compliance with M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25;
- (b) Attendance at a training session authorized by the Attorney General;
- (c) Nullification of any action taken at the relevant meeting, in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposition of a fine upon the public body of not more than \$1,000 for each intentional violation;
- (e) That an employee be reinstated without loss of compensation, seniority, tenure or other benefits;
- (f) That minutes, records or other materials be made public; or
- (g) Other appropriate action.

Orders issued following a hearing shall be available on the Attorney General's website.

(4) A public body or any member of a body aggrieved by any order issued by the Attorney General under 940 CMR 29.07 may obtain judicial review of the order through an action in Superior Court seeking relief in the nature of certiorari. Any such action must be commenced in Superior Court within 21 days of receipt of the order.

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29.08: Advisory Opinions

The Attorney General may issue advisory opinions on request or at his or her own initiative to provide guidance to public bodies and the public on changes to M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25, court decisions interpreting M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25, or other developments concerning M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25.

(1) The Attorney General shall ordinarily make a draft advisory opinion available for comment on the Attorney General's website at least 60 days prior to the planned issuance of the opinion. Notice of the posting shall be provided to the Commission.

(2) Comments on the draft advisory opinion shall be submitted, in writing, to the Attorney General at least 30 days prior to the planned issuance of the opinion.

(3) Action taken by a public body in good faith compliance with an advisory opinion, provided that the circumstances are not materially different, shall not constitute an intentional violation of the M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25.

[To Top](#)**29.09: Other Enforcement Actions**

Nothing in 940 CMR 29.06 or 29.07 shall limit the Attorney General's authority to file a civil action to enforce M.G.L. c. 30A, sec 18-25 M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 18-25 pursuant to M.G.L. c. 30A, sec. 23(f).

[To Top](#)**29.10: Remote Participation**

(1) Preamble. Remote participation may be permitted subject to the following procedures and restrictions. However, the Attorney General strongly encourages members of public bodies to physically attend meetings whenever possible. By promulgating these regulations, the Attorney General hopes to promote greater participation in government. Members of public bodies have a responsibility to ensure that remote participation in meetings is not used in a way that would defeat the purposes of the Open Meeting Law, namely promoting transparency with regard to deliberations and decisions on which public policy is based.

(2) Adoption of Remote Participation. Remote participation in meetings of public bodies is not permitted unless the practice has been adopted as follows:

- (a) Local Public Bodies. The Chief Executive Officer, as defined in M.G.L. c. 4, sec. 7, must authorize or, by a simple majority, vote to allow remote participation in accordance with the requirements of these regulations, with that authorization or vote applying to all subsequent meetings of all local public bodies in that municipality.
- (b) Regional or District Public Bodies. The regional or district public body must, by a simple majority, vote to allow remote participation in accordance with the requirements of these regulations, with that vote applying to all subsequent meetings of that public body and its committees.
- (c) Regional School Districts. The regional school district committee must, by a simple majority, vote to allow remote participation in accordance with the requirements of these regulations, with that vote applying to all subsequent meetings of that public body and its committees.
- (d) County Public Bodies. The county commissioners must, by a simple majority, vote to allow remote participation in accordance with the requirements of these regulations, with that vote applying to all subsequent meetings of all county public bodies in that county.
- (e) State Public Bodies. The state public body must, by a simple majority, vote to allow remote participation in accordance with the requirements of these regulations, with that vote applying to all subsequent meetings of that public body and its committees.
- (f) Retirement Boards. A retirement board created pursuant to M.G.L. c. 32, sec. 20 or M.G.L. c. 34B, § 19 must, by a simple majority, vote to allow remote participation in accordance with the requirements of these regulations, with that vote applying to all subsequent meetings of that public body and its committees.
- (3) Revocation of Remote Participation. Any person or entity with the authority to adopt remote participation pursuant to 940 CMR 29.10(2) may revoke that adoption in the same manner.
- (4) Minimum Requirements for Remote Participation.
 - (a) Members of a public body who participate remotely and all persons present at the meeting location shall be clearly audible to each other.
 - (b) A quorum of the body, including the chair or, in the chair's absence, the person authorized to chair the meeting, shall be physically present at the meeting location, as required by M.G.L. c. 30A, sec 20(d).
 - (c) Members of public bodies who participate remotely may vote and shall not be deemed absent for the purposes of M.G.L. c. 39, sec. 23D.
- (5) Permissible Reasons for Remote Participation. If remote participation has been adopted in accordance with 940 CMR 29.10(2), a member of a public body shall be permitted to participate remotely in a meeting, in accordance with the procedures described in 940 CMR 29.10(7), if the chair or, in the chair's absence, the person chairing the meeting, determines that one or more of the following factors makes the member's physical attendance unreasonably difficult:
 - (a) Personal illness;
 - (b) Personal disability;
 - (c) Emergency;
 - (d) Military service; or
 - (e) Geographic distance.

(e) Technology.

(a) The following media are acceptable methods for remote participation. Remote participation by any other means is not permitted. Accommodations shall be made for any public body member who requires TTY service, video relay service, or other form of adaptive telecommunications.

(i) telephone, internet, or satellite enabled audio or video conferencing;

(ii) any other technology that enables the remote participant and all persons present at the meeting location to be clearly audible to one another.

(b) When video technology is in use, the remote participant shall be clearly visible to all persons present in the meeting location.

(c) The public body shall determine which of the acceptable methods may be used by its members.

(d) The chair or, in the chair's absence, the person chairing the meeting, may decide how to address technical difficulties that arise as a result of utilizing remote participation, but is encouraged, wherever possible, to suspend discussion while reasonable efforts are made to correct any problem that interferes with a remote participant's ability to hear or be heard clearly by all persons present at the meeting location. If technical difficulties result in a remote participant being disconnected from the meeting, that fact and the time at which the disconnection occurred shall be noted in the meeting minutes.

(e) The amount and source of payment for any costs associated with remote participation shall be determined by the applicable adopting entity identified in 940 CMR 29.10(2).

(7) Procedures for Remote Participation.

(a) Any member of a public body who wishes to participate remotely shall, as soon as reasonably possible prior to a meeting, notify the chair or, in the chair's absence, the person chairing the meeting, of his or her desire to do so and the reason for and facts supporting his or her request.

(b) At the start of the meeting, the chair shall announce the name of any member who will be participating remotely and the reason under 940 CMR 29.10(5) for his or her remote participation. This information shall also be recorded in the meeting minutes.

(c) All votes taken during any meeting in which a member participates remotely shall be by roll call vote.

(d) A member participating remotely may participate in an executive session, but shall state at the start of any such session that no other person is present and/or able to hear the discussion at the remote location, unless presence of that person is approved by a simple majority vote of the public body.

(e) When feasible, the chair or, in the chair's absence, the person chairing the meeting, shall distribute to remote participants, in advance of the meeting, copies of any documents or exhibits that he or she reasonably anticipates will be used during the meeting. If used during the meeting, such documents shall be part of the official record of the meeting, and shall be listed in the meeting minutes and retained in accordance with M.G.L.c. 30A, sec. 22.

(8) Further Restriction by Adopting Authority. These regulations do not prohibit any person or entity with the authority to adopt remote participation pursuant to 940 CMR 29.10(2) from enacting policies, laws, rules or regulations that prohibit or further restrict the use of remote participation by public bodies within that person or entity's jurisdiction, provided those policies, laws, rules or regulations do not violate state or federal law.

(9) Remedy for Violation. If the Attorney General determines, after investigation, that 940 CMR 29.10 has been violated, the Attorney General may resolve the investigation by ordering the public body to temporarily or permanently discontinue its use of remote participation.

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Tab 3

Public Body Checklist for Posting a Meeting Notice

Issued by the Attorney General's Division of Open Government – March 12, 2013

Notice Contents

- ☐ The notice contains the date, time, and location of the meeting. G.L. c. 30A, § 20(b).
- ☐ If the meeting is a joint meeting of several public bodies, the names of all bodies meeting are listed.
- ☐ The notice contains all of the topics that the chair reasonably anticipates will be discussed at the meeting. G.L. c. 30A, § 20(b). The topics are sufficiently specific to reasonably advise the public of the issues to be discussed at the meeting, including executive session topics. See G.L. c. 30A, § 20(b); 940 CMR 29.03(1)(b).
- ☐ The notice is printed in a legible, easily understandable format. G.L. c. 30A, § 20(b).
- ☐ The date and time that the notice is posted is conspicuously recorded on the notice. 940 CMR 29.03(1)(b).

Notice Publication

- ☐ The notice is published at least 48 hours before the meeting, not including Saturdays, Sundays and legal holidays. G.L. c. 30A, § 20(b).
- ☐ The notice is posted with the proper authority. G.L. c. 30A, § 20(c); 940 CMR 29.03(2)-(6).
 - Local public bodies - Filed with the municipal clerk, who must post it either:
 - In a location conspicuously visible to the public at all hours in or on the municipal building where the clerk's office is located; or
 - If an alternative posting method, such as a website, has been adopted, at the alternative location, with a description of the alternative method posted in a manner conspicuously visible to the public at all hours on or adjacent to the main and handicapped accessible entrances to the building in which the clerk's office is located. Meeting notice must also be available in or around the clerk's office so that members of the public may view the notices during normal business hours.
 - State public bodies – Posted to a website, and a copy sent to the Secretary of State's Regulations Division.
 - Regional public bodies – Posted in every municipality within the region, unless the public body has adopted an alternative notice posting method.
 - County public bodies - Filed with the office of the county commissioners and a copy of the notice is publicly posted in a manner conspicuously visible to the public at all hours in such place or places as the county commissioners shall designate for the purpose, unless the public body has adopted an alternative notice posting method.

Note that this checklist is intended as an educational guide, and does not constitute proof of compliance with the Open Meeting Law. Checklists are updated periodically, so please confirm that you are using the most current version. For questions, please contact the Attorney General's Division of Open Government at 617-963-2540 or via email at openmeeting@state.ma.us. For more information on the Open Meeting Law, please visit www.mass.gov/agd/openmeeting.

Public Body Checklist for Entering Into Executive Session

Issued by the Attorney General's Division of Open Government – March 12, 2013

- ☐ Executive session listed as a topic for discussion on meeting notice, including as much detail about the purpose for the executive session as possible without compromising the purpose for which it is called. See G.L. c. 30A, § 20(b); 940 CMR 29.03(1)(b).
- ☐ Public body convened in open session first. G.L. c. 30A, § 21(b)(1).
- ☐ Chair publicly announced the purpose for executive session, citing one or more of the 10 purposes found at G.L. c. 30A, § 21(a).
- ☐ Chair stated all subjects that may be revealed without compromising the purpose for which the executive session was called. G.L. c. 30A, § 21(b)(3). For example, the Chair identified the party a public body may be negotiating with or the litigation matter the public body will be discussing.
- ☐ Chair stated whether the public body will adjourn from the executive session, or will reconvene in open session after the executive session. G.L. c. 30A, § 21(b)(4).
- ☐ For Executive Session Purposes 3, 6, and 8:
 - Chair publicly stated the having the discussion in open session would have a detrimental effect on the public body's negotiating position, bargaining position, litigating position, or ability to obtain qualified applicants. G.L. c. 30A, §§ 21(a)(3), (6), (8).
- ☐ A majority of members of the body voted by roll-call to enter into executive session. G.L. c. 30A, § 21(b)(2).

Note that this checklist is intended as an educational guide, and does not constitute proof of compliance with the Open Meeting Law. Checklists are updated periodically, so please confirm that you are using the most current version. For questions, please contact the Attorney General's Division of Open Government at 617-963-2540 or via email at openmeeting@state.ma.us. For more information on the Open Meeting Law, please visit www.mass.gov/ago/openmeeting.

Public Body Checklist for Creating and Approving Meeting Minutes

Issued by the Attorney General's Division of Open Government – March 12, 2013

- ☐ Minutes must accurately set forth the date, time, place of the meeting, and a list of the members present or absent. G.L. c. 30A, § 22(a).
- ☐ Minutes must include an accurate summary of the discussion of each subject. See G.L. c. 30A, § 22(a). The summary does not need to be a transcript, but should provide enough detail so that a member of the public who did not attend the meeting could read the minutes and understand what occurred and how the public body arrived at its decisions.
- ☐ The minutes must include a record of all the decisions made and the actions taken at each meeting, including a record of all votes. G.L. c. 30A, § 22(a).
- ☐ The minutes must include a list of all of the documents and other exhibits used by the public body during the meeting. G.L. c. 30A, § 22(a). Documents and exhibits used at the meeting are part of the official record of the session, but do not need to be physically attached to the minutes. See G.L. c. 30A, §§ 22(d), (e).
- ☐ If one or more public body members participated remotely in the meeting, the minutes must include the name(s) of the individual(s) participating remotely, and their reason(s) under 940 CMR 29.10(5) for remote participation. 940 CMR 29.10(7)(b).
- ☐ If one or more public body members participated remotely in the meeting, the minutes must record all votes as roll call votes. 940 CMR 29.10(7)(c).
- ☐ Executive session minutes must record all votes as roll call votes. G.L. c. 30A, § 22(b).
- ☐ The minutes must be approved in a timely manner. G.L. c. 30A, § 22(c). Generally, this should occur at the next meeting of the public body.

Note that this checklist is intended as an educational guide, and does not constitute proof of compliance with the Open Meeting Law. Checklists are updated periodically, so please confirm that you are using the most current version. For questions, please contact the Attorney General's Division of Open Government at 617-963-2540 or via email at openmeeting@state.ma.us. For more information on the Open Meeting Law, please visit www.mass.gov/ago/openmeeting.

Tab 4

Sample Motions for Entering Executive Session
Under the New Open Meeting Law

PURPOSE	MOTION	CHAIR'S STATEMENT
Reputation or Character	I move to enter executive session to discuss the reputation or character, of an individual.	
Physical or Mental Condition	I move to enter executive session to discuss the physical condition or mental health of an individual.	
Discipline or Dismissal	I move to enter executive session to discuss the discipline or dismissal of a public officer, employee, staff member or individual.	
Complaints or Charges	I move to enter executive session to discuss complaints or charges brought against a public officer, employee, staff member or individual.	
Preparation for Nonunion Negotiations	I move to enter executive session to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel.	
Nonunion Negotiations	I move to enter executive session to conduct contract negotiations with nonunion personnel.	
Collective Bargaining Strategy	I move to enter executive session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining.	Chair declares: "An open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position" of the Board.
Collective Bargaining	I move to enter executive session to conduct collective bargaining sessions.	
Litigation Strategy	I move to enter executive session to discuss strategy with respect to litigation.	Chair declares: "An open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position" of the Board or

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PURPOSE	MOTION	CHAIR'S STATEMENT
Mediation (Litigation)	I move to enter executive session to meet or confer with a mediator with respect to litigation.	Chair declares: "The parties to the mediation are _____; the issues involved in the mediation are _____; and the purpose of the mediation is _____. No action will be taken by [the Board or Commission] with respect to those issues without deliberation and approval for the action at an open session."
Mediation (Other)	I move to enter executive session to meet or confer with a mediator with respect to a decision on public business.	Chair declares: "The parties to the mediation are _____; the issues involved in the mediation are _____; and the purpose of the mediation is _____. No action will be taken by [the Board or Commission] with respect to those issues without deliberation and approval for the action at an open session."
Security Matters	I move to enter executive session to discuss the deployment of security personnel or devices, or strategies with respect thereto.	
Criminal Matters	I move to enter executive session to investigate charges of criminal misconduct or to consider the filing of criminal complaints.	
Real Property	I move to enter executive session to consider the purchase, exchange, lease or value of real property.	Chair declares: "An open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the negotiating position" of the Board or Commission.
Compliance with Law	I move to enter executive session to comply with, or act under the authority of, any general or special law.	
Federal Aid	I move to enter executive session to comply with, or	

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PURPOSE	MOTION	CHAIR'S STATEMENT
	act under the authority of federal grant-in-aid requirements.	
Preliminary Screening of Applicants	I move to enter executive session to consider or interview applicants for employment or appointment by a preliminary screening committee.	Chair declares: "An open meeting will have a detrimental effect in obtaining qualified applicants, and the meeting is not to consider or interview applicants who have passed a prior preliminary screening."
Energy Matters	I move to enter executive session to discuss trade secrets or confidential, competitively-sensitive or other proprietary information concerning an energy supplier, municipal aggregator or cooperative.	Chair declares: "Disclosure of the trade secrets or confidential, competitively-sensitive or other proprietary information will adversely affect the ability to conduct business in relation to other entities making, selling or distributing electric power and energy."

Tab 5



The Official Website of the Attorney General of Massachusetts

Attorney General

Martha Coakley

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OML FAQ: Meeting Notices

Meeting Notices

May two or more public bodies hold a joint meeting?

Yes, two or more public bodies may hold a joint meeting. However, each public body participating in the meeting must provide notice pursuant to G.L. c. 30A, § 20. The public bodies must provide independent notice of their meetings, or if posting a single notice, must clearly state that each public body will be meeting.

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May a public body consider a topic at a meeting that was not listed in the meeting notice?

Yes, if it is a topic that the chair did not reasonably anticipate 48 hours before the meeting. If a meeting topic is proposed after the meeting notice is posted, the public body is encouraged to update its posting to provide the public with as much notice as possible of what subjects will be discussed during a meeting. Although a public body may consider a topic that was not listed in the meeting notice if unanticipated, the Attorney General strongly encourages public bodies to postpone discussion and action on topics that are controversial or may be of particular interest to the public if those topics were not listed in the meeting notice.

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How specific must the listing of topics be in the meeting notice?

The listing of topics must contain enough specificity to give the public an understanding of each topic that will be discussed. It is not sufficient to list broad topic categories, such as "Old Business." For example, when the Chair of a Board of Selectmen reasonably anticipates a discussion about on-going traffic improvement projects in town at the next Board meeting, it would be appropriate for the Chair to list that topic in the notice as: "Discussion of Traffic Improvement Projects at the Intersection of Main and Pleasant Streets; and at the Intersection of Elm and Oak Streets." In some instances, there may be overlap in the posting requirements of the Open Meeting Law and other statutes. In most cases, the information required by the controlling statute will satisfy the Open Meeting Law meeting notice requirements, however for specific questions please contact the Division of Open Government.

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May our public body list a section for "New Business" to cover topics which come up for the first time at the meeting in the meeting notice?

Yes, this category may be used for topics that the Chair did not reasonably anticipate for discussion when filing the meeting notice to be posted. Some public bodies use this to category for their public comment or open forum periods. The best practice would be to explicitly state in the notice that the time is being reserved for topics that the chair did not reasonably anticipate would be discussed.

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What is the posting method for state public bodies?

State public bodies have different notice posting requirements than local public bodies. A state public body must post its meeting notice on its website or, if none exists, then the website of its parent agency. It must also submit a copy of the meeting notice to the Secretary of State's Regulations Division. It is not necessary to send meeting notices to the Attorney General, however, the public body must notify the Attorney General of the website location where its meeting notices will be posted.

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Is it a violation of the Open Meeting Law for the Chair of a public body to neglect to inform other members of a meeting?

No, provided that the meeting is posted in accordance with the requirements of the Open Meeting Law. The Open Meeting Law requires that public bodies post meetings at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting excluding Saturdays, Sundays and legal holidays, but the law does not include a requirement that the Chair notify other members of meetings. The best practice is for the Chair to notify all members of the public body of the meeting sufficiently in advance to allow members to make plans to attend but in no case later than 48 hours in advance of the meeting.

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May a public body hold a meeting on a Sunday?

While the Open Meeting Law is silent with regard to holding public meetings on Sundays, the best practice is not to hold public meetings on Sundays or holidays when access to public buildings may be limited and when the public does not normally anticipate the scheduling of a public meeting.

[To Top](#)**If a public body holds a properly noticed meeting, and decides to continue the meeting until a future date, is the public body required to post another meeting notice?**

Yes, the public body must treat the meeting as though it is a new meeting for purposes of notice posting. The public body must post the meeting 48 hours in advance and post a new meeting notice.

[To Top](#)**Will posting meeting notices on the municipal website fulfill the meeting notice requirements of the Open Meeting Law?**

Yes, provided that website is the designated alternate posting method for the municipality and the meeting notice satisfies all the other requirements of the Open Meeting Law: 1) it is posted at least 48 hours in advance of the public meeting, excluding Saturdays, Sundays and legal holidays; 2) it is displayed in a legible, easily understandable format; 3) it contains the date, time and place of the meeting; 4) it lists the topics that the Chair reasonably anticipates will be discussed at the meeting with sufficient specificity to advise the public of the issues the public body will discuss; and 5) the date and time that the notice was posted is conspicuously recorded on the notice. Public bodies are encouraged to coordinate with the municipal clerk, or the person designated by agreement with the municipal clerk, to ensure that meeting notices are filed sufficiently in advance of the meeting to allow the municipal clerk or the designee to post the meeting 48 hours in advance.

For example, if a Board of Selectmen plans to meet on a Monday night at 6:00 p.m. but the municipal clerk's office closes at 1:00 on Thursday, the Chair of the Board should plan to submit the notice for filing and posting in advance of 1:00 to allow the municipal clerk ample time to post the meeting notice. It is the public body's responsibility to ensure that the meeting notice is received for posting by the municipal clerk or the clerk's designee.

[To Top](#)**If a meeting notice for a regional public body is filed in all the towns in the region, with the exception of one, is the meeting notice posted adequately?**

No, the meeting notice must be filed with the municipal clerk in each city and town within the district. As an alternative method of notice, a regional public body may post a meeting notice on the regional public body's website.

[To Top](#)**If a subcommittee of a public body holds a meeting and members of the public body, who are not members of the subcommittee, wish to attend the meeting, must the public body post a meeting notice?**

No, as long as the public body does not engage in a deliberation. Members of a public body may wish to attend a meeting of a subcommittee of that public body, even where those members are not part of the subcommittee. In those cases, they may sit in the audience and participate as members of the public. They may address the public body with the permission of the chair, and may state their opinion on matters under consideration by the subcommittee. They may not discuss matters as a quorum, or discuss topics which are not under consideration by the subcommittee. Doing so would constitute a deliberation, and a separate meeting notice for the public body would be required. The subcommittee convening the meeting must still post its regular meeting notice.

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OML FAQ: Public Bodies

Public Bodies

May a preliminary screening committee, which meets in executive session under purpose 8 to consider candidates for employment or appointment, consist of more than a quorum of the members of the parent body?

No, a preliminary screening committee must consist of fewer than a quorum of the members of the parent body. It may contain additional members who are not members of the parent body. For example, a school committee with seven members may create a subcommittee to conduct a preliminary screening of candidates for superintendent of schools in executive session, and the preliminary screening committee may contain up to three members of the school committee, in addition to several teachers and members of the community.

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Is a committee or board created by a public official subject to the Open Meeting Law?

It depends.

The OML does not apply to committees or boards informally appointed by individual officials to carry out duties that are assigned to such officials. Accordingly, where a public official creates a committee to advise that public official on a decision that he or she has sole responsibility for the committee or board would not be subject to the Open Meeting Law. See Connelly v. School Committee of Hanover, 409 Mass. 232 (1991), in which the SJC held that a high school principal selection committee appointed by the school superintendent to assist him in choosing candidates was not a governmental body subject to the OML. Because the superintendent could have chosen a school principal entirely on his own without creating the committee to advise him on a candidates, his informal creation of a committee did not subject the body to the Open Meeting Law.

However, where a public official creates a committee because they are required to do so by law, regulation or at the direction of a governing authority such as a City Council or Board of Selectmen, then the committee will likely be subject to the Open Meeting Law.

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OML FAQ: Evaluations

Evaluations

May a public body perform an evaluation of an employee in executive session?

No. Deliberations conducted for the explicit purpose of evaluating the professional competency of an individual may not occur during an executive session. See G.L. c. 30A, §21(a)(1). While conclusions drawn from deliberations about professional competency may be part of a deliberation for another executive session purpose, the evaluation of professional competency, itself, must occur during an open session. For example, as part of the discussion in preparation for renegotiating a superintendent's contract, a school committee may wish to consider the results of an annual professional competency evaluation. The evaluation results may be considered as part of deliberations about strategy held in executive session, however only after deliberations about professional competency were held during a previously convened open session.

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Are individual evaluations completed by members of public bodies public records?

Yes. The Open Meeting Law carves out an exception from the personnel records exemption from the Public Records Law for "materials used in a performance evaluation of an individual bearing on his professional competence," that were created by members of a public body and used during a meeting. See G.L. c. 30A, §22(e). Individual evaluations created and used by members of a public body for the purpose of evaluating an employee are public records. Comprehensive evaluations that aggregate the individual public body members' evaluations are also public records if they are used during the course of a meeting. However, evaluations conducted by individuals who are not members of public bodies are not public records. For example, the individual evaluations created by municipal employees in response to a request for feedback on the town administrator are not public records, provided the employees completing the evaluations are not also members of the public body tasked with evaluating the town administrator's professional competency.

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May the individual evaluations of an employee be aggregated into a comprehensive evaluation?

Yes. Members of a public body may individually create evaluations, and then submit them to an individual to aggregate into a master evaluation document to be discussed at an open meeting. Ideally, members of the public body should submit their evaluations for completion to someone who is not a member of the public body, for example, an administrative assistant. If this is not a practical option, then the chair or other designated public body member may compile the evaluations. However, once the individual evaluations are submitted for aggregation there should be no deliberation among members of the public body regarding the content of the evaluations outside of an open meeting, whether in person or over email.

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May a public body discuss issues relative to the salary of a public employee in executive session?

It depends. Discussions of salary issues may only occur in executive session as part of a contract negotiation. See G.L. c. 30A, § 21(a)(2), (3). Other discussions related to salary, such as a discussion about whether an employee's job performance merits a bonus or salary increase, must be conducted in open session.

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**Attorney General
Martha Coakley**

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OML FAQ: Meeting Minutes

Meeting Minutes

Must documents used by a public body at a meeting be retained with the minutes?

No, documents used by a public body at a meeting may be retained separately from the minutes. However, once used by the public body at a meeting, the documents become part of the official record and therefore must be maintained in accordance with the public record retention schedule issued by the Secretary of State. The minutes must still list all the documents used by the public body.

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Must the minutes of meetings list all members of the public body?

The Open Meeting Law requires that the minutes of a meeting list the names of the members present or absent. However, the best practice is to list the names of all members present *and* absent in the minutes of the meeting.

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