

Discussion of Changes to Open Meeting Laws Affecting COA October 2023

Overview

This item provides information on the passage of [Senate Bill 544](#) (Chap 216, Stats of 2023) that implements changes to the Bagley Keene Open Meeting Act beginning on January 1, 2024.

Staff Recommendation

This is an information item. No action is needed.

Background

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Governor and the Legislature approved temporary changes to the Bagley Keene Open Meeting Act to ensure that government operations could continue uninterrupted. Some of these provisions were extended through December 2023. Over the past few years, it has become apparent that there have been advantages to allowing state boards and commissions to meet virtually as well as expanded opportunities for the public to also attend virtually and provide public comment. It has been noted that these flexibilities have been particularly helpful to foster greater participation by members of the public, especially for those for whom travel to in person public meetings was prohibitive such as those without transportation, who lived or worked in remote parts of the state, with limited resources, or individuals with disabilities.

In recognition of these advantages, the legislature made additional changes to California's open meeting law that take effect beginning January 1, 2024 through January 1, 2026. The link to the full text of [SB 544](#) as well as the legislative staff analysis ([SB 544 Analysis](#)) are provided.

Over the next few weeks, staff will be working to understand the implications and allowances under the new law. Staff anticipates guidance from Commission leadership and will follow such direction in accordance with the law beginning in January with the COA's first meeting in 2024. It is anticipated, though, that the COA will continue to meet in person at the Commission offices for most, if not all, meetings with the exception of the August meeting which has typically been held via teleconference due to its shortened agenda. It is also anticipated that the Commission will continue to provide a variety of ways in which the public may participate in meetings to allow for the greatest possible public participation opportunities.