

2016 -- H 7601

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2016

A N A C T

RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- OPEN MEETINGS

Introduced By: Representatives Naughton, Ajello, Regunberg, Amore, and Bennett

Date Introduced: February 12, 2016

Referred To: House Judiciary

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Sections 42-46-6 and 42-46-7 of the General Laws in Chapter 42-46
2 entitled "Open Meetings" are hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **42-46-6. Notice.** -- (a) All public bodies shall give written notice of their regularly
4 scheduled meetings at the beginning of each calendar year. The notice shall include the dates,
5 times, and places of the meetings and shall be provided to members of the public upon request
6 and to the secretary of state at the beginning of each calendar year in accordance with subsection
7 (f).

8 (b) Public bodies shall give supplemental written public notice of any meeting within a
9 minimum of forty-eight (48) hours, excluding weekends and state holidays in the count of hours,
10 before the ~~date~~ commencement time of the meeting. This notice shall include the date the notice
11 was posted, the date, time and place of the meeting, and a statement specifying the nature of the
12 business to be discussed. Copies of the notice shall be maintained by the public body for a
13 minimum of one year. Nothing contained herein shall prevent a public body, other than a school
14 committee, from adding additional items to the agenda by majority vote of the members. School
15 committees may, however, add items for informational purposes only, pursuant to a request,
16 submitted in writing, by a member of the public during the public comment session of the school
17 committee's meetings. Said informational items may not be voted upon unless they have been
18 posted in accordance with the provisions of this section. Such additional items shall be for
19 informational purposes only and may not be voted on except where necessary to address an

1 unexpected occurrence that requires immediate action to protect the public or to refer the matter
2 to an appropriate committee or to another body or official.

3 (c) Written public notice shall include, but need not be limited to, posting a copy of the
4 notice at the principal office of the public body holding the meeting, or if no principal office
5 exists, at the building in which the meeting is to be held, and in at least one other prominent place
6 within the governmental unit, and electronic filing of the notice with the secretary of state
7 pursuant to subsection (f); however, nothing contained herein shall prevent a public body from
8 holding an emergency meeting, upon an affirmative vote of the majority of the members of the
9 body when the meeting is deemed necessary to address an unexpected occurrence that requires
10 immediate action to protect the public. If an emergency meeting is called, a meeting notice and
11 agenda shall be posted as soon as practicable and shall be electronically filed with the secretary of
12 state pursuant to subsection (e) and, upon meeting, the public body shall state for the record and
13 minutes why the matter must be addressed in less than forty-eight (48) hours [in accordance with](#)
14 [§42-46-6\(b\)](#) and only discuss the issue or issues which created the need for an emergency
15 meeting. Nothing contained herein shall be used in the circumvention of the spirit and
16 requirements of this chapter.

17 (d) Nothing within this chapter shall prohibit any public body, or the members thereof,
18 from responding to comments initiated by a member of the public during a properly noticed open
19 forum even if the subject matter of a citizen's comments or discussions were not previously
20 posted, provided such matters shall be for informational purposes only and may not be voted on
21 except where necessary to address an unexpected occurrence that requires immediate action to
22 protect the public or to refer the matter to an appropriate committee or to another body or official.
23 Nothing contained in this chapter requires any public body to hold an open forum session, to
24 entertain or respond to any topic nor does it prohibit any public body from limiting comment on
25 any topic at such an open forum session. No public body, or the members thereof, may use this
26 section to circumvent the spirit or requirements of this chapter.

27 (e) A school committee may add agenda items not appearing in the published notice
28 required by this section under the following conditions:

29 (1) The revised agenda is electronically filed with the secretary of state pursuant to
30 subsection (f), and is posted on the school district's website and the two (2) public locations
31 required by this section at least forty-eight (48) hours in advance of the meeting [in accordance](#)
32 [with §42-46-6\(b\)](#);

33 (2) The new agenda items were unexpected and could not have been added in time for
34 newspaper publication;

1 (3) Upon meeting, the public body states for the record and minutes why the agenda
2 items could not have been added in time for newspaper publication and need to be addressed at
3 the meeting;

4 (4) A formal process is available to provide timely notice of the revised agenda to any
5 person who has requested that notice, and the school district has taken reasonable steps to make
6 the public aware of this process; and

7 (5) The published notice shall include a statement that any changes in the agenda will be
8 posted on the school district's web site and the two (2) public locations required by this section
9 and will be electronically filed with the secretary of state at least forty-eight (48) hours in advance
10 of the meeting [in accordance with §42-46-6\(b\)](#).

11 (f) All notices required by this section to be filed with the secretary of state shall be
12 electronically transmitted to the secretary of state in accordance with rules and regulations which
13 shall be promulgated by the secretary of state. This requirement of the electronic transmission and
14 filing of notices with the secretary of state shall take effect one year after this subsection takes
15 effect.

16 (g) If a public body fails to transmit notices in accordance with this section, then any
17 aggrieved person may file a complaint with the attorney general in accordance with § 42-46-8.

18 **42-46-7. Minutes.** -- (a) All public bodies shall keep written minutes of all their
19 meetings. The minutes shall include, but need not be limited to:

20 (1) The date, time, and place of the meeting;

21 (2) The members of the public body recorded as either present or absent;

22 (3) A record by individual members of any vote taken; and

23 (4) Any other information relevant to the business of the public body that any member of
24 the public body requests be included or reflected in the minutes.

25 (b) (1) A record of all votes taken at all meetings of public bodies, listing how each
26 member voted on each issue, shall be a public record and shall be available, to the public at the
27 office of the public body, within two (2) weeks of the date of the vote. The minutes shall be
28 public records and unofficial minutes shall be available, to the public at the office of the public
29 body, within thirty-five (35) days of the meeting or at the next regularly scheduled meeting,
30 whichever is earlier, except where the disclosure would be inconsistent with §§ 42-46-4 and 42-
31 46-5 or where the public body by majority vote extends the time period for the filing of the
32 minutes and publicly states the reason.

33 (2) In addition to the provisions of subdivision (b)(1), all volunteer fire companies,
34 associations, fire district companies, or any other organization currently engaged in the mission of

1 extinguishing fires and preventing fire hazards, whether it is incorporated or not, and whether it is
2 a paid department or not, shall post unofficial minutes of their meetings within twenty-one (21)
3 days of the meeting, but not later than seven (7) days prior to the next regularly scheduled
4 meeting, whichever is earlier, on the secretary of state's website.

5 (c) The minutes of a closed session shall be made available at the next regularly
6 scheduled meeting unless the majority of the body votes to keep the minutes closed pursuant to
7 §§ 42-46-4 and 42-46-5.

8 (d) All public bodies ~~within the executive branch of the state government and all state~~
9 ~~public and quasi-public boards, agencies and corporations, and those public bodies set forth in~~
10 ~~subdivision (b)(2)~~, shall keep official and/or approved minutes of all meetings of the body and
11 shall file a copy of the minutes of all open meetings with the secretary of state for inspection by
12 the public within thirty-five (35) days of the meeting; provided that this subsection shall not apply
13 to public bodies whose responsibilities are solely advisory in nature.

14 (e) All minutes and unofficial minutes required by this section to be filed with the
15 secretary of state shall be electronically transmitted to the secretary of state in accordance with
16 rules and regulations which shall be promulgated by the secretary of state. If a public body fails to
17 transmit minutes or unofficial minutes in accordance with this subsection, then any aggrieved
18 person may file a complaint with the attorney general in accordance with § 42-46-8.

19 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect on January 1, 2017.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

A N A C T
RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- OPEN MEETINGS

1 This act would exclude weekends and state holidays from the calculation of the forty-
2 eight (48) hour public notice requirement, and requires all public bodies to keep minutes of open
3 meetings and file their minutes with the secretary of state.

4 This act would take effect on January 1, 2017.

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