

Continued Pandemic-Era Flexibility for Town Meetings

Over the weekend, Governor Baker [signed a supplemental budget bill](#) funding COVID-19-related items. The bill also addresses several other pandemic-related issues. Of greatest importance to towns are Sections 15 and 26, which give towns continued flexibility to modify their town meetings in light of the pandemic.

Section 15 permits towns, upon a vote of the select board and with the town moderator's approval, to reduce "the number of voters necessary to constitute a quorum at any town meeting" by as much as ninety percent. As in the past year, the select board must "publish notice of its intention to consider" proceeding with a reduced quorum at least seven days in advance.

Section 26 permits towns which use representative town meetings to hold town meeting remotely. To do so, first, the moderator must determine that it is impossible to hold town meeting safely and in compliance with any applicable public health orders or guidance. After making that determination, the moderator must write to the select board to request that the town hold a remote town meeting. The select board then must vote on the moderator's request within ten business days. If the select board votes to proceed remotely, town meeting members must vote at the outset of the meeting on whether to ratify the select board's decision. If town meeting members overrule the select board, the town meeting may either resume in person at a time and place already specified by the select board, or the town meeting will be dissolved, and the select board may call a town meeting with a new warrant. Section 26 also lays out requirements for the platform used to host a remote town meeting, and procedures for ensuring that adequate notice is given even if the warrant has already issued.

These provisions are temporary. Both will be automatically repealed on July 15, 2022 unless extended by a subsequent law.

Other provisions that may be of interest to municipalities include:

- Section 2A, which appropriates funds for COVID testing and high-quality masks in elementary and secondary public school districts, charter schools, and educational collaboratives;
- Section 12, which permits [remote notarizations](#) to continue until July 15, 2022; and
- Sections 16 and 28, which adjust the dates for the state primary election and the issuance of general-election ballots to voters covered under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act to September 6 and 24, 2022, respectively.