



COMMON CAUSE MINNESOTA

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Common Cause MN is a nonpartisan grassroots organization working to create open, honest, and accountable government, more information about our work at www.commoncause.org.

We are grateful to Rep. Koegel, for introducing HF4413 creating space for the much-needed debate on the use of interactive technology used for advisory public bodies and transparency in an accountable government.

Common Cause MN fights for open, accessible, accountable government, and we know that transparency is a requirement for democracy. Only through transparency can power be held accountable.

We are asking members vote no on HF4413 or table the bill until more work is done on the most concerning aspects of this bill. We ally with the Minnesota Coalition on Government Information (MNCOGI)'s concerns, and those of many others dedicated to educating Minnesotans, advocating and litigating when necessary to promote government transparency and the public's right to know. HF4413 may be a good idea in concept but is not adequately developed to be ready to pass.

Although technology allowing for remote participation under some circumstances can indeed support public participation, in this case, it can very easily be used with the opposite effect. Lack of transparency is a direct barrier to democracy.

HF4413 fundamentally changes the "public place" requirement for some boards of local governing bodies, allowing members to attend meetings remotely — without appearing in a public place — for up to a six-month period. Although a member's remote location must (in large part) be evident during their remote participation, the public and press would not have in-person access to board members to ask follow-up questions or have in-person access to members and others that would otherwise be available.

While HF4413 applies to nonelected members of advisory boards, we want to emphasize that these boards often perform important policymaking functions. Even if advisory board recommendations must later be formally ratified by an elected body, much policy creation work is often undertaken by the boards themselves. Such boards deal with a myriad of policy areas; police oversight and budget amendments are two common examples. Under the changes proposed in HF4413, advisory board members dealing with such key governance issues could actually not attend any in-person meetings for up to six months. How does that work to cultivate greater trust between the government and those impacted by the decisions of these advisory boards?

Metro Cities is also pushing HF4554/SF4461 which eliminates the "public place" requirement for all §13D.02 meetings. We appreciate HF4413 doesn't go as far as HF4554 and does a better job of attempting to limit the scope, however, we would encourage more effort placed in further refining HF4413 to curb the negative impact on in-person meetings compliance with Minnesota's Open Meeting Laws.

We respectfully ask members of this committee, and Rep. Koegel, to reconsider making the necessary changes to address the various concerns expressed by MNCOGI and the democracy partners working on greater transparency in government who've submitted written statements on HF4413.

Thank you for your dedication to all Minnesotans as you work in committee.

democracy is **OUR** common cause

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