

2024 Brown Act HANDBOOK

Summary of the Major Provisions and Requirements
of the Ralph M. Brown Act

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- › Summary and Discussion of the Major Provisions of the Brown Act
 - › Text of the Ralph M. Brown Act
 - › Updated including changes effective January 1, 2024



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INTRODUCTION

This Handbook is prepared to provide you with a summary of the major provisions of California's open meeting law for local governments – the Ralph M. Brown Act, including rules about calling and holding various types of meetings and closed sessions, as well as guidelines for how to avoid serial meetings. The second part contains the complete text of the Brown Act. This Handbook is designed for local government officials and staff and we hope you will find it useful. Should you have any questions about the information included in this Handbook, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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PART ONE:

SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR PROVISIONS AND REQUIREMENTS OF THE RALPH M. BROWN ACT



Summary of the Major Provisions and Requirements of the Ralph M. Brown Act

The Ralph M. Brown Act, more commonly known as the “Brown Act,” is California’s “sunshine” law for local government. The Brown Act is found in the California Government Code commencing with Section 54950. In a nutshell, the Brown Act requires local government business to be conducted at open and public meetings, except in certain limited situations. This Handbook briefly summarizes and discusses the major provisions of the Brown Act.

I. APPLICATION OF BROWN ACT TO “LEGISLATIVE BODIES”

The requirements of the Brown Act apply to “legislative bodies” of local governmental agencies. The term “legislative body” is defined to include the governing body of a local agency (e.g., the city council or the board of supervisors) and any commission, committee, board, or other body of the local agency, whether permanent or temporary, decision-making or advisory, that is created by formal action of a legislative body. § 54952(a)-(b) (unless indicated otherwise, all statutory references herein are to the California Government Code).

Standing committees of a legislative body, that have either “continuing subject matter jurisdiction” or a meeting schedule fixed by formal action of the legislative body, are also subject to the requirements of the Brown Act. Some common examples include the finance, personnel, or similar policy subcommittees of a legislative body. Standing committees exist to make routine, regular recommendations on a specific subject matter. These committees continue to exist over time and survive resolution of any one issue or matter. They are also a regular part of the governmental structure.

The Brown Act does not apply to “ad hoc” committees comprised solely of members of the legislative body that are less than a quorum of the body, provided these committees do not have a “continuing subject matter jurisdiction,” or a meeting schedule fixed by formal action of the legislative body. Such ad hoc committees are purely advisory; they generally serve only a limited or single purpose, are not perpetual, and are dissolved when their specific task is completed.

Advisory and standing committees, but not ad hoc committees, are required to have agendas, and to have their agendas posted at least 72 hours in advance of their meetings. If this is done, the meeting is considered to be a regular meeting for all purposes. § 54954(a). If the agenda is not posted at least 72 hours in advance, the meeting must be treated as a special meeting, and all of the limitations and requirements for special meetings apply, as discussed later in Section VIII of this Handbook.

The governing boards of some private corporations, limited liability companies, and private entities may be subject to the Brown Act under certain circumstances. A private entity's governing board constitutes a legislative body within the meaning of the Brown Act if either of the following applies: (i) the private entity is created by an elected legislative body to exercise lawfully delegated authority of the legislative body; or (ii) the private entity receives funds from a local agency and its governing board includes a member of the legislative body of the local agency who was appointed by the legislative body to the governing board as a full voting member. § 54952(c). Additionally, charter schools and entities managing charter schools may also be subject to the Brown Act. Educ. Code, § 47604.1(b)(1).

The Brown Act also applies to persons who are elected to serve as members of a legislative body of a local agency even before they assume the duties of office. § 54952.1. Under this provision, the statute is applicable to newly elected, but not-yet-sworn-in, members of the legislative body.

II. DEFINITION OF “MEETING”

The central provision of the Brown Act requires that all “meetings” of a legislative body be open and public. The Brown Act defines the term “meeting” very broadly in § 54952.2(a), and encompasses almost every gathering of a majority of legislative body members, including:

“[A]ny congregation of a majority of the members of a legislative body at the same time and location, including a teleconference, . . . to **hear, discuss, deliberate, or take action** on any item that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body.”

In plain English, this definition means that a meeting is any gathering of a majority of council members, board of directors or other applicable legislative body, to hear, discuss or deliberate any item of local agency business or potential local agency business. It is important to emphasize that a meeting occurs if a majority gathers to hear, discuss or deliberate on a matter and not just voting or taking action on the issue.

III. EXCEPTIONS TO MEETING REQUIREMENT

There are six types of gatherings that are not subject to the Brown Act. We commonly refer to these exceptions as: (1) the individual contact exception; (2) the seminar or conference exception; (3) the community meeting exception; (4) the other legislative body exception; (5) the social or ceremonial occasion exception; and (6) the standing committee exception. Unless a gathering of a majority of the members of a legislative body falls within one of the exceptions discussed below, even if a majority of members are merely in the same room listening to a discussion of local agency business, they will

be participating in a meeting within the meaning of the Brown Act that requires notice, an agenda, and a period for public comment.

A. The Individual Contact Exception

Conversations, whether in person, by telephone, video conferencing, or other means, between a member of a legislative body and any other person do not constitute a meeting under the Brown Act. § 54952.2(c)(1). However, such contacts may constitute a “serial meeting” (discussed below) in violation of the Brown Act, if the individual also makes a series of individual contacts with other members of the legislative body, and communications with these other members are used to “discuss, deliberate, or take action on any item of business that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body.” § 54952.2(b)(1).

B. The Seminar or Conference Exception

Attendance by a majority of the legislative body at a seminar, conference or similar educational gathering is generally exempted from Brown Act requirements. § 54952.2(c)(2). However, in order to qualify under this exception, the seminar or conference must be open to the public and must involve issues of general interest to the public or to local agencies. Attendance at a California League of Cities or California Contract Cities seminar is an example of an educational gathering that fulfills these requirements. However, as with many of the exceptions, this exception will not apply if a majority of legislative body members discuss among themselves items of specific business relating to their own local agency other than as part of the scheduled program.

C. The Community Meeting Exception

The community meeting exception allows a majority of legislative body members to attend privately sponsored neighborhood meetings, town hall forums, chamber of commerce lunches or other community meetings at which issues of local interest are discussed. § 54952.2(c)(3). In order to fall within this exception, however, the community meeting must satisfy specific criteria. First, the community meeting must be “open and publicized.” Therefore, a homeowners' association meeting restricted to the residents of a particular development and only publicized to those residents cannot be attended by a majority of the legislative body without following the Brown Act requirements because the meeting does not qualify for the exception. And again, for those meetings that fall within the community meeting exception, a majority of legislative body members cannot discuss among themselves items of business of their own local agency other than as part of the scheduled program.

D. The Other Legislative Body Exception

This exception allows a majority of members of any legislative body to attend open and noticed meetings of other legislative bodies of their local agency, or of another local agency, without treating such attendance as a meeting of the body. § 54952.2(c)(4).

Of course, the legislative body members are prohibited from discussing items of business of their local agency among themselves other than as part of the scheduled meeting.

E. The Social or Ceremonial Occasion Exception

As has always been the case, the Brown Act does not apply to attendance by a majority of the legislative body members at purely social or ceremonial occasions. § 54952.2(c)(5). This exception only applies if a majority of legislative body members do not discuss among themselves items of business of their local agency.

F. The Standing Committee Exception

The standing committee exception allows members of a legislative body, who are not members of a standing committee of that body, to attend an open and noticed meeting of the committee without making the gathering a meeting of the full legislative body itself. § 54952.2(c)(6). If a majority of the legislative body is created by the attendance of the additional members, the legislative body members who are not members of the standing committee may attend only as “observers.” This means that the noncommittee members of the legislative body should not speak at the standing committee’s meeting, sit in their usual seat on the dais, or otherwise participate in the meeting. It is generally recommended that, if a standing committee meeting is likely to be attended by other legislative body members, then the meeting should be agendized as a meeting of the whole legislative body. This will allow full participation by all members of the legislative body.

IV. PERMITTED LOCATIONS OF MEETINGS AND TELECONFERENCING

A. Permitted Locations of Meetings

The Brown Act generally requires all meetings of a legislative body to occur within the boundaries of the local agency. § 54954(b). There are limited exceptions to this rule, however, such as allowing meetings with a legislative body of another local agency in that agency’s jurisdiction. Meetings held outside of a local agency’s boundaries pursuant to an exception still must comply with agenda and notice requirements, as discussed below.

B. Teleconferencing

The role of “teleconferencing,” or using telephonic and/or video technology in public meetings was expanded significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Because the Brown Act relies on physical, in-person meetings as the primary means to achieve its goals of public participation and transparency, the law has traditionally limited a local agency’s ability to use teleconferencing to hold public meetings.

Generally, teleconferencing may only be used by members of a legislative body as a way to participate fully in the meeting from remote locations. § 54953(b). If one or more members participate in a meeting via teleconferencing, the following requirements apply to that meeting: (1) the remote location must be connected to the main meeting location by telephone, video or both; (2) the notice and agenda of the meeting must identify the remote location; (3) the remote location must be posted and accessible to the public; (4) all votes must be by roll call; and (5) the meeting must comply with the Brown Act, which includes allowing participation by members of the public present in remote locations. A quorum of the legislative body must participate from locations within the agency's jurisdiction, but other members may participate from outside the jurisdiction. These teleconferencing rules only apply to members of the legislative body. Staff members, attorneys or consultants may participate remotely without following the posting and public access requirements of the teleconferencing rules.

On March 17, 2020, Governor Newsom issued Executive Order ("EO") N-29-20, which temporarily relaxed these traditional teleconferencing requirements in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. EO N-29-20 and the Governor's COVID-19 state of emergency have expired, but recent amendments to the Brown Act, described below, now provide other alternatives to the standard teleconferencing rules under specific conditions. The Brown Act's standard teleconferencing rules described in the preceding paragraph remain available in lieu of the alternatives described below.

1) Assembly Bill 361

AB 361 (2021), which was recently amended by AB 557 (2023), built upon EO N-29-20 to provide a statutory basis in the Brown Act for relaxed teleconferencing requirements during the COVID-19 declared emergency. As described below, however, there must be a proclaimed state of emergency for an agency to rely on AB 361. Because the Governor has since lifted the COVID-19 state of emergency as of February 28, 2023,¹ agencies will be unable to rely on AB 361 after that date absent a new emergency declaration, which does not have to be related to COVID-19.

The teleconferencing option authorized by AB 361 has been extended by the legislature and will remain available indefinitely. AB 361 authorizes local agencies to continue meeting remotely *during a state of emergency proclaimed by the Governor* without following the Brown Act's standard teleconferencing provisions, including the requirement that meetings be conducted in physical locations, if the agency has already determined or is determining whether, as a result of the emergency, meeting in person would present imminent risks to the health or safety of attendees. § 54953(e)(1)(A)-(B). "State of emergency" means a state of emergency proclaimed pursuant to Section 8625 of the California Emergency Services Act.

AB 361 generally requires legislative bodies to make remote public meetings accessible telephonically or otherwise electronically to all members of the public seeking to observe and to address the local legislative body, and to adhere as closely as reasonably possible

¹ Governor Newsom Marks End of California's COVID-19 State of Emergency (Feb. 28, 2023), available at: <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2023/02/28/governor-newsom-marks-end-of-californias-covid-19-state-of-emergency/> (as of Dec. 22, 2023).

to the provisions of the Brown Act. AB 361 provides the following procedures and requirements for conducting remote meetings as follows:

1. **Public Comment Opportunities in Real Time:** A legislative body that meets remotely pursuant to AB 361 must allow members of the public to access the meeting via a call-in option or an internet-based service option, and the agenda for the remote meeting must provide an opportunity for members of the public to directly address the body in real time. Although the agency may still ask for public comments to be submitted in advance, the agency cannot require public comments to be submitted in advance of the meeting. § 54953(e)(2)(E). Agencies may not close a public comment period until members of the public are given the opportunity to register and the time for that comment period has elapsed, whether it is for a specific agenda item or a general comment period. If an agency does not provide a timed public comment period, but takes public comment separately on each agenda item, it must allow a reasonable amount of time per agenda item to allow members of the public the opportunity to provide public comment, including time to register or “otherwise be recognized for the purpose of providing public comment.” § 54953(e)(2)(E)(ii).
2. **No Action During Disruptions:** In the event of a disruption that prevents the local agency from broadcasting the remote meeting, or in the event of a disruption within the local agency's control that prevents members of the public from offering public comments using the call-in option or internet-based service option, AB 361 prohibits the legislative body from taking any further action on items appearing on the meeting agenda until public access to the meeting via the call-in or internet-based options is restored. § 54953(f)(1)(D).
3. **Periodic Findings:** To continue meeting remotely pursuant to AB 361, an agency must make periodic findings that: (1) the body has reconsidered the circumstances of the declared emergency; and (2) the emergency impacts the ability of the body's members to meet safely in person. § 54953(e)(3). These findings must be made not later than 45 days (previously 30 days) after teleconferencing for the first time pursuant to AB 361, and every 45 days (previously 30 days) thereafter. We recommend that after the agency makes these findings for the first time, it place on the agenda (as a placeholder) “reconsideration” of the findings every 45 days thereafter. § 54953(e)(3).

2) **Assembly Bill 2449**

AB 2449 (2022) provides alternate authority, separate from both the traditional Brown Act teleconferencing requirements and the relaxed teleconferencing requirements during declared emergencies under AB 361. The provisions of AB 2449 are effective for a period of three years beginning January 1, 2023 and ending January 1, 2026.

AB 2449 requires at least a quorum of the legislative body to participate in person from a singular, physical location clearly identified on the agenda, open to the public, and situated within the boundaries of the territory over which the agency exercises jurisdiction. § 54953(f)(1). AB 2449 allows other individual members to participate remotely without posting agendas at all teleconference locations, identifying all such locations in the agendas, or making each teleconference location open to the public in two specified circumstances: (1) "just cause" or (2) "emergency circumstances."

"Just cause" means any of the following: (A) a childcare or caregiving need of a child, parent, grandparent, grandchild, sibling, spouse, or domestic partner that requires them to participate remotely; (B) a contagious illness that prevents a member from attending in person; (C) a need related to a physical or mental disability not otherwise accommodated by the agency's procedures for receiving and swiftly resolving requests for reasonable accommodation for individuals with disabilities, consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act; or (D) travel while on official business of the legislative body or another state or local agency. § 54953(j)(2).

To participate remotely for just cause, a member must notify the legislative body "at the earliest opportunity possible, including at the start of a regular meeting, of their need to participate remotely for just cause." § 54953(f)(2)(A)(i). This notification must include a general description of the circumstances relating to their need to appear remotely at the given meeting.

"Emergency circumstances" means a physical or family medical emergency that prevents a member from attending a meeting in person. § 54953(j)(1).

To participate remotely due to emergency circumstances, the member must request the legislative body to allow them to participate in the meeting remotely due to emergency circumstances and the legislative body must take action to approve the request. § 54953(f)(2)(A)(ii). If the legislative body does not approve the request, the member may not participate via teleconference under AB 2449 at that meeting other than as a member of the public. The legislative body must request a general description of the circumstances relating to the member's need to appear remotely at the given meeting. A general description need not exceed 20 words and does not require the member to disclose any medical diagnosis or disability, or any personal medical information that is already exempt under existing law. A legislative body member should request to participate remotely at a meeting due to emergency circumstances as soon as possible, and a separate request is required for each meeting in which they seek to participate remotely. § 54953(f)(2)(A)(i)(I). The legislative body may approve such a request by a majority vote. §§ 54953(f)(2)(A)(i)(II); 54954.2(b)(4). If the request is received at least 72 hours before a regular meeting, the legislative body's action on the request should be included on the agenda. If the request does not allow sufficient time to place proposed action on such a request on the posted agenda for the meeting, the legislative body may take action at the beginning of the meeting. § 54953(f)(2)(A)(i)(III).

There are strict limits on how often AB 2449 may be used for individual members. For "just cause," legislative members are only allowed to participate remotely up to two meetings per calendar year. Otherwise, legislative members may not participate solely by

teleconference from a remote location for a period of more than three consecutive months or 20 percent of the regular meetings for the legislative body within a calendar year, or more than two meetings if the legislative body regularly meets fewer than 10 times per calendar year.

At the meeting before any action is taken, members of the legislative body participating remotely pursuant to AB 2449 must publicly disclose whether any other individuals 18 years of age or older are present in the room at the remote location with the member, and the general nature of the member's relationship with any such individuals. § 54953(f)(2)(B). Members must also participate through both audio and visual technology to allow the public to remotely hear and visually observe them. § 54953(f)(2)(C).

Local agencies relying on AB 2449 must follow certain requirements for noticing and conducting remote meetings similar to those required by AB 361. Meeting notices and agendas must identify the means by which members of the public may access the meeting and offer public comment. § 54953(f)(1)(B). Meeting agendas must identify and include an opportunity for all persons to attend and address the legislative body directly via a call-in option, via an internet-based service option, and at the in-person location of the meeting. § 54953(f)(1)(C). In the event of a disruption that prevents the legislative body from broadcasting the meeting to members of the public using the call-in option or internet-based service option, or in the event of a disruption within the agency's control that prevents members of the public from offering public comments using the call-in option or internet-based service option, the legislative body may take no further action on items appearing on the meeting agenda until public access to the meeting via the call-in option or internet-based service option is restored. § 54953(f)(1)(D). The legislative body may not require public comments to be submitted in advance of the meeting and must provide an opportunity for the public to address the legislative body and offer comment in real time. § 54953(f)(1)(E).

V. ADA COMPLIANCE

Pursuant to Section 54953.2, all meetings of a legislative body, other than closed session meetings or parts of meetings involving a closed session, are required to be held in a location and conducted in a manner that complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

However, local agencies must ensure that remote meetings are conducted in a manner that allows persons with a disability to participate to the fullest extent possible. Additionally, if requested, the agenda and documents in the agenda packet shall be made available in alternative formats to persons with a disability. § 54954.1. The agenda shall include information regarding how, to whom and when a request for disability-related modification or accommodation, including auxiliary aids or services, may be made by a person with a disability who requires a modification or accommodation in order to participate in the meeting. § 54954.2.

VI. SIMULTANEOUS OR SUCCESSIVE MEETINGS

A legislative body that has convened a meeting and whose membership constitutes a quorum of any other legislative body may convene a meeting of that other legislative body, simultaneously or successively, only if a clerk or a member of the convened legislative body announces the following prior to convening the simultaneous or successive meeting:

- 1) There is a subsequent legislative body;
- 2) The amount of compensation or stipend, if any, each member may receive as a result of the multiple meetings; and
- 3) The compensation or stipend is provided as a result of convening the multiple meetings.

The amount of compensation and stipend is not required to be announced if it is listed in a statute without additional compensation authorized by the local agency, and in any case, the announced "compensation" does not include amounts reimbursed for actual and necessary expenses incurred by a member in the performance of his or her official duties. § 54952.3.

VII. SERIAL MEETINGS

In addition to regulating all gatherings of a majority of the members of a legislative body, the Brown Act also addresses certain contacts between individual members of the legislative body. On the one hand, the Brown Act specifically provides that nothing in the Act is intended to impose requirements on individual contacts or conversations between a member of a legislative body and any other person. § 54952.2(c)(1). This provision even applies to individual contacts between two members of the legislative body (the individual contact exception to the "meeting" described above). Despite this exception, however, the Brown Act prohibits "serial meetings." § 54952.2(b)(1).

A serial meeting is a series of meetings or communications, either in person or by other means, between individual members of the legislative body in which ideas are exchanged among a majority of a legislative body regarding an item of business that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body. A serial meeting can occur even though a majority of legislative body members never gather in a room at the same time. For example, an email response concerning an agency's business circulating among a majority of the members of the legislative body, such as "reply to all," could be considered a serial meeting. A serial meeting typically occurs in one of two ways. The first is when a staff member, a legislative body member or some other person individually contacts a majority of legislative body members and shares ideas among the majority (e.g., "I've talked to members A and B and they will vote 'yes.' Will you?"). Alternatively,

member A calls member B, who then calls member C and so on, until a majority of the legislative body has discussed or deliberated or has taken action on the item of business.

The prohibition against serial meetings does not, however, prohibit communications between staff and legislative body members for the purpose of answering questions or providing information regarding a matter that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the local agency, as long as the staff person does not communicate with other members of the legislative body, the comments or positions of any other member of the legislative body. § 54952.2(b)(2).

Social media interactions between or among members of a legislative body can also raise serial meeting concerns. However, the prohibition against serial meetings does not prevent communication between members of a legislative body and members of the public on internet-based social media platforms to answer questions, provide information to the public, or to solicit information from the public regarding a matter that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body provided that: (i) a majority of the members of the legislative body do not use the social media platform to discuss among themselves business of a specific nature that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body, and (ii) members of the legislative body do not respond directly to any communication on a social media platform regarding a matter that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body that is made, posted, or shared by any other member of the legislative body. § 54952.2(b)(3).

Observing the following guidelines can avoid inadvertent violation of the serial meeting rule.

A. Contacts with Staff

Staff can inadvertently become a conduit among a majority of a legislative body in the course of providing briefings on items of local agency business. Originally, the California Court of Appeal held that staff briefings of individual city council members do not constitute an illegal serial meeting under the Brown Act unless there was additional evidence that: (1) staff acted as a personal intermediary for other members of the legislative body; and (2) the meetings led to a collective concurrence among members of the legislative body. Following that decision, the state legislature amended Government Code Section 54952.2 in 2008, effective in 2009, to further clarify that staff briefings of individual city council members for the purpose of answering questions or providing information regarding an item of business do not constitute an illegal serial meeting under the Brown Act as long as a staff person does not communicate the comments or positions of a member of the legislative body to other members. Staff briefings must therefore be handled carefully. To avoid having a staff briefing become a serial meeting:

- Staff briefings of members of the legislative body should be “unidirectional” when done on an individual basis for a majority of the legislative body. This means that information should flow from staff to the member, and the member’s participation should be limited to asking questions and acquiring information. Otherwise, if multiple members separately give staff direction

thereby causing staff to shape or modify their ultimate recommendations in order to reconcile the views of a majority of the members, a violation might occur.

- A legislative body member should not ask staff to describe the views of any other members of the legislative body, and staff should not volunteer those views if known.
- Staff may present their views to a legislative body member during an individual contact, but staff should not ask for that member's views unless it is absolutely clear that staff is not discussing the matter with a majority of the legislative body.

B. Contacts with Constituents, Developers and Lobbyists

A constituent, developer or lobbyist can also inadvertently become an intermediary among a majority of members of a legislative body thereby creating an illegal serial meeting in violation of the Brown Act. Such person's unfamiliarity with the requirements of the Brown Act aggravate this potential problem because they may expect a legislative body member to be willing to commit to a position in a private conversation in advance of a meeting. To avoid violations arising from contacts with constituents, developers and lobbyists:

- State the ground rules "up front." Ask if the person has talked, or intends to talk, with other members of the legislative body about the same subject. If the answer is "yes," then make it clear that the person should not disclose the views of other legislative body member(s) during the conversation.
- Explain to the person that you will not make a final decision on a matter prior to the meeting. For example: "State law prevents me from giving you a commitment outside a noticed meeting. I will listen to what you have to say and give it consideration as I make up my mind."
- Do more listening and asking questions than expressing opinions. If you disclose your thoughts about a matter, counsel the person not to share them with other members of the legislative body.
- Be especially careful with discussions about matters involving "quasi-judicial" land use decisions such as subdivision maps, site development plans, conditional use permits or variances. Consult with your city attorney or legal counsel before the meeting in order to avoid any potential problems involving illegal prejudice against the project or illegally receiving evidence about the project outside of the administrative record.

C. Contacts with Fellow Members of the Same Legislative Body

Direct contacts concerning local agency business with fellow members of the same legislative body – whether through face-to-face or telephonic conversations, notes, letters, online exchanges, email with or to staff members – are the most obvious means by which an illegal serial meeting can occur. This is not to say that a member of a legislative body is precluded from discussing items of local agency business with another member of that legislative body outside of a meeting; as long as the communication does not involve a majority of the legislative body, no “meeting” has occurred. There is, however, always the risk that one participant in the communication will disclose the views of the other participant to a third or fourth legislative body member, creating the possibility of a discussion of an item of business outside a noticed public meeting. Therefore, avoid discussing city business with a majority of the members of your legislative body and communicating the views of other legislative body members outside a meeting.

D. Contacts on Social Media

Social media engagement can also inadvertently lead to concerns of creating an illegal serial meeting in violation of the Brown Act. The Brown Act was previously silent regarding social media and its use by members of a legislative body, leading to uncertainty as to whether certain uses of social media could result in unintended violations of the Brown Act. Assembly Bill 992, passed in 2020 and effective January 1, 2021, amended certain provisions of the Brown Act until January 1, 2026 to clarify allowable uses of social media under the Act.

A member of a legislative body may engage in separate conversations or communications on an internet-based social media platform to answer questions, provide information to the public, or to solicit information from the public regarding a matter that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body. However, a majority of the members of the legislative body cannot use the internet-based social media platform to discuss among themselves business of a specific nature that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body. Further, a member of the legislative body is prohibited from responding directly to any communication on an internet-based social media platform regarding a matter that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body that is made, posted, or shared by any other member of the legislative body. § 54952.2(b)(3)(A). Unlike other serial meeting restrictions that are invoked when there are contacts of a majority of the legislative body, this provision is triggered when there is interaction between as little as two members of a body. For purposes of these provisions, such interaction includes commenting or using digital icons that express reactions to communications made by other members of the legislative body. § 54952.2(b)(3)(B)(i). Thus, it is now clear that “liking” a post or using a digital icon is considered a discussion under the Brown Act.

Therefore, to avoid violations arising from social media engagement, members of a legislative body should avoid interacting on social media platforms with any other

members of their legislative body regarding matters within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body.

These suggested rules of conduct may seem unduly restrictive and impractical, and may make acquiring important information more difficult or time-consuming. Nevertheless, following them will help assure that your conduct comports with the Brown Act's goal of achieving open government. If you have questions about compliance with the Act in any given situation, you should seek advice from your city attorney or legal counsel. Adherence to the foregoing guidelines is not a substitute for securing advice from your legal counsel.

VIII. NOTICE, AGENDA AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

A. Time of Notice and Content of Agenda

Two key provisions of the Brown Act which ensure the public's business is conducted openly are the requirements that legislative bodies publicly post agendas prior to their meetings, (§§ 54954.2, 54955, 54956 and 54957.5) and that no action or discussion may occur on items or subjects not listed on the posted agenda (§ 54954.2). The limited exceptions to the rule against discussing or taking action not on a posted agenda are discussed further below.

Legislative bodies, except advisory committees and standing committees, are required to establish a time and place for holding regular meetings. § 54954(a). A "regular" meeting is a meeting that occurs on the legislative body's established meeting day. Generally, agendas for a regular meeting must be publicly posted 72 hours in advance of the meeting in a place that is freely accessible to the public.

Agendas must contain a brief general description of each item of business to be transacted or discussed at the meeting. § 54954.2(a). The description should inform the public of the "essential nature" of the matter, but need not exceed 20 words. *San Diegans for Open Government v. City of Oceanside*, 4 Cal. App. 5th 637 (2016). Courts will uphold a challenge to the sufficiency of an agenda item description when the description provides fair notice of what the agency will consider. The *San Diegans for Open Government* case provides an example of a sufficient agenda description that provides fair notice. In *San Diegans for Open Government*, the Oceanside City Council approved a subsidy agreement with a hotel developer using the following agenda item description:

Adoption of a resolution to approve: 1. An Agreement Regarding Real Property (Use Restrictions) between the City of Oceanside and SD Malkin Properties Inc. to guarantee development and use of the property as a full service resort consistent with the entitlements for the project; 2. An Agreement Regarding Real Property to provide a mechanism to share Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) generated by

the Project; 3. A Grant of Easement to permit construction of a subterranean parking garage under Mission Avenue; 4. A report required by AB 562 prepared by Paul Marra of Keyser Marston and Associates documenting the amount of subsidy provided to the developer, the proposed start and end date of the subsidy, the public purpose of the subsidy, the amount of the tax revenue and jobs generated by the project; and 5. A License Agreement to permit construction staging for the project on a portion of Lot 26.

The court ruled that this agenda description complied with the requirements of Government Code Section 54954.2 because the agenda description expressly gave the public notice that the council would consider a fairly substantial development of publicly owned property as a hotel, that the City would share the transient occupancy tax generated by the project and that the transaction would involve a subsidy by the City. Additional information, while helpful, was not necessary to provide fair notice of the essential nature of the action under state law. The court found that the language of the agenda, considered as a whole, provided more than a “clue” that the City planned to provide the developer with a substantial and ongoing financial subsidy in exchange for the project.

In contrast, in *Hernandez v. Town of Apple Valley*, 7 Cal. App. 5th 194 (2017), the court held that the Apple Valley Town Council’s agenda description was insufficient. There, the Apple Valley Town Council adopted three resolutions that called for a special election related to an initiative to adopt a commercial specific plan and the filing of arguments and rebuttal arguments for and against the initiative. In addition, the Town Council adopted a Memorandum of Understanding (“MOU”) that authorized the acceptance of a gift from an interested party, Wal-Mart, to pay for the special election. The agenda description for the matter read “Wal-Mart Initiative Measure” and included a recommendation for action that read “[p]rovide direction to staff.”

The court reiterated that the Brown Act requires that each item of business be placed on the agenda. Specifically, the court highlighted that nothing in the agenda description, or even in the agenda packet, indicated that the Town Council was going to consider an MOU to accept a gift from Wal-Mart to pay for a special election to pass the initiative. The court concluded that the City violated the Brown Act by omitting the MOU from the agenda description because the omission meant that the plaintiff was given no notice of the item of business.

Furthermore, agendas should make clear whether items may be acted on or whether they are informational only. Thus, if an agenda for a meeting states that the legislative body will only “discuss” an item, the legislative body may not take an “action” on that item.

Agendas must also be posted on the local agency’s website, if one exists, for City Council meetings, and meetings of any other legislative body where some members are City Council members and are compensated for their appearance. While the language of the 72 hour posting requirement appears absolute, the California Attorney General opined that technical difficulties, such as a power failure, cyber-attack or other third-

party interference that prevents a local agency from posting its agenda on its website for the full 72 hours will not necessarily preclude the legislative body from lawfully holding its meeting. 99 Ops. Cal. Atty. Gen. 11 (2016). Whether a public meeting may continue as scheduled requires a fact specific analysis that turns on whether the local agency has otherwise “substantially complied” with the Brown Act’s agenda posting requirements by properly posting a physical agenda and making other “reasonably effective efforts” (such as making the agenda available on social media or some other alternative website) to notify the public of the meeting.

Please note that a Planning Commission’s or a City Council’s proposed approval of a CEQA document, such as an environmental impact report or a negative declaration, is a distinct item of business separate from the item approving the project and must be expressly described in an agenda. *San Joaquin Raptor Rescue Center v. County of Merced*, 216 Cal. App. 4th 1167 (2013). In addition, one court has held that a Planning Commission’s or a City Council’s consideration of a CEQA exemption is also a distinct item of business for purposes of the Brown Act. *G.I. Industries v. City of Thousand Oaks* (2022) 84 Cal. App. 5th 814 (ordered not published by California Supreme Court, February 15, 2023).

A “special” meeting is a meeting that is held at a time or place other than the time and place established for regular meetings. For special meetings, the “call and notice” of the meeting and the agenda must be posted in a publicly accessible area, including in some cases on the local agency’s website, at least 24 hours prior to the meeting. § 54956(a). Additionally, each member of the legislative body must personally receive written notice of the special meeting either by personal delivery or by “any other means” (such as facsimile, email or U.S. mail) at least 24 hours before the time of the special meeting, unless they have previously waived receipt of written notice. Members of the press (including radio and television stations) and other members of the public can also request written notice of special meetings and, if they have, then that notice must be given at the same time notice is provided to members of the legislative body.

An “emergency” meeting may be called to address certain emergencies, such as a terrorist act or crippling disaster, without complying with the 24-hour notice requirement. Certain requirements apply for notifying the press and for conducting closed sessions as part of those meetings and except as specified, all other rules governing special meetings apply. § 54956.5.

Both regular and special meetings may be adjourned to another time. Notices of adjourned meetings must be posted on the door of the meeting chambers where the meeting occurred within 24 hours after the meeting is adjourned. § 54955. If the adjourned meeting occurs more than five days after the prior meeting, a new agenda for that adjourned meeting must be posted 72 hours in advance of the adjourned meeting. § 54954.2(b)(3).

The Brown Act requires local agencies to mail the agenda or the full agenda packet to any person making a written request no later than the time the agenda is posted or is delivered to the members of the body, whichever is earlier. Additionally, a local agency with an internet website must send a website link to or a copy of the agenda or the full

agenda packet by email, if a person requests that the documents be sent by email. A local agency may charge a fee to recover its costs of copying and mailing. Any person may make a standing request to receive these materials, in which event the request must be renewed annually. Failure by any requestor to receive the agenda does not constitute grounds to invalidate any action taken at a meeting. § 54954.1.

B. Action and Discussion on Non-agenda Items

The Brown Act also ensures the public's business is conducted openly by restricting a legislative body's ability to deviate from posted agendas. The statute affords a legislative body limited authority to act on or discuss non-agenda items at regular meetings, but forbids doing so at special meetings.

As a general rule, a legislative body may not act on or discuss any item that does not appear on the agenda posted for a regular meeting. § 54954.2(a)(3). This rule does not, however, preclude a legislative body from acting on a non-agenda item that comes to the local agency's attention subsequent to the agenda posting which requires immediate action. § 54954.2(b)(2). In order to utilize this exception, the legislative body must make findings of both components of the exception by a two-thirds vote of those present (by unanimous vote if less than two-thirds of the body is present). This means that if four members of a five-member body are present, three votes are required to add the item; if only three are present, a unanimous vote is required. In addition, an item not appearing on an agenda may be added if the legislative body determines by a majority vote that an emergency situation exists. § 54954.2(b)(1). For purposes of this exception, the term "emergency situation" refers to work stoppages or crippling disasters that severely impair public health, safety, or both.

AB 2449 discussed above, also allows a legislative body act at the beginning of a meeting on a request from a member to participate in a meeting remotely due to emergency circumstances pursuant to AB 2449 if the member's request to participate remotely does not allow sufficient time to place the proposed action on the posted agenda for the meeting for which the request is made. § 54953(f)(2)(A)(i)(II); § 54954.2(b)(4). The legislative body may approve such a request by a majority vote of the legislative body. § 54954.2(b)(4).

In addition to the general exceptions discussed above, a legislative body may also discuss non-agenda items at a regular meeting under the following five additional exceptions:

- Members of the legislative body or staff may briefly respond to statements made or questions posed by persons during public comment periods;
- Members of the legislative body or staff may ask a question for clarification, make a brief announcement or make a brief report on their own activities;
- Members of the legislative body may, subject to the procedural rules of the body, provide a reference to staff or other resources for factual information;

- Members of the legislative body may, subject to the procedural rules of the body, request staff to report back to the legislative body at a subsequent meeting concerning any matter; and
- Members of the legislative body may, subject to the procedural rules of the body, take action to direct staff to place a matter of business on a future agenda.

Therefore, spending a few minutes to discuss whether a matter should be placed on a future agenda or asking staff procedural questions is permissible. *Cruz v. City of Culver City*, 2 Cal.App. 5th 239 (2016). The legislative body may not, however, discuss non-agenda items to any significant degree. This means there should not be long or wide-ranging question and answer sessions on non-agenda items between the legislative body and the public or between the legislative body and staff. It is important to follow these exceptions carefully and construe them narrowly to avoid tainting an important and complex action by a non-agendized discussion of the item.

The Brown Act contains even more stringent regulations to restrict action on and discussion of non-agenda items at special meetings. In particular, the statute mandates that only business that is specified in the “call and notice” of the special meeting may be considered by the legislative body. § 54956. Notwithstanding, a special meeting may not be called to discuss compensation of a local agency executive. § 54956(b).

C. Reporting of Actions

The Brown Act mandates the public reporting of individual votes or abstentions by members of legislative bodies on any given motion or action. This requirement may be satisfied in most situations by reporting the individual vote or abstention of each member in the minutes of a meeting. § 54953(c). The Brown Act also requires that the legislative body orally report a summary of recommendations made with respect to the salary, salary schedule or compensation paid to a local agency executive. The legislative body must issue the report at the same meeting in which the final action on compensation is being considered. § 54953(c)(3).

IX. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

A. Regular Meetings

The Brown Act mandates that every agenda for a regular meeting provide an opportunity for members of the public to directly address the legislative body on any matter that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body. § 54954.3(a). In addition, the Brown Act requires the legislative body to allow members of the public to comment on any item on the agenda either before or during the body’s consideration of that item. § 54954.3(a). Also, although not required under the Brown Act, local agencies may consider reading written comments received into the public record by the city clerk, or his or her designee, subject to reasonable time and content limitations

imposed in accordance with the requirements outlined below in Section C (titled Limitations on the Length and Content of Public Comments).

Some local agencies accomplish both public comment requirements by placing a general audience comment period at the beginning of the agenda where the public can comment on both agenda and non-agenda items. Others provide public comment periods as each item or group of items comes up on the agenda, and then leave the general public comment period to the end of the agenda. Either method is permissible, though public comment on public hearing items must be taken during the hearing.

The Brown Act allows a legislative body to preclude public comments on an agenda item in one limited situation sometimes referred to as the "committee exception" - where the item was considered by a committee, composed solely of members of the body, that held a meeting where public comments on that item were allowed. So, if the legislative body has standing committees (which are required to have agendaized and open meetings with an opportunity for the public to comment on agenda items) and the committee has previously considered an item, then at the time the item comes before the full legislative body, the body may choose not to take additional public comments on that item. However, if the version presented to the full legislative body is different from the version presented to, and considered by, the committee, then the public must be given another opportunity to speak on that item at the meeting of the full body. § 54954.3(a).

B. Public Comments at Special Meetings

The Brown Act requires that agendas for special meetings provide an opportunity for members of the public to address the legislative body concerning any item listed on the agenda before or during the body's consideration of that item. § 54954.3(a). Unlike regular meetings, though, the legislative body does not have to allow public comment on non-agenda matters at a special meeting. Additionally, unlike regular meetings, the exception to the requirement for public comment opportunity for items already considered by a committee (i.e., the "committee exception") does not apply to special meetings. *Preven v. City of Los Angeles*, 32 Cal. App. 5th 925, 936 (2019).

C. Limitations on the Length and Content of Public Comments

A legislative body may adopt reasonable regulations limiting the total amount of time allocated to each person for public testimony. § 54954.3(b). Typical time limits restrict speakers to three or five minutes. If an individual utilizes a translator to give testimony and simultaneous translation equipment is not used, the legislative body must allot at least twice the standard amount of time to the speaker. § 54954.3(b)(2). A legislative body may also adopt reasonable regulations limiting the total amount of time allocated for public testimony on legislative matters, such as a zoning ordinance or other regulatory ordinance. However, setting total time limits per item for any quasi-judicial matter, such as a conditional use permit application, is not recommended because the time

restriction could violate the due process rights of those who were not able to speak to the body during the time allotted.

The Brown Act precludes a legislative body from prohibiting public criticism of the policies, procedures, programs or services of the local agency or the acts or omissions of the body. § 54954.3(c). This restriction does not mean that a member of the public may say anything during public testimony. If the topic of the public's comments falls outside the subject matter jurisdiction of the local agency, the legislative body may stop a speaker's comments if the comments are disruptive, as described below.

A legislative body also may adopt reasonable rules of decorum that preclude a speaker from disrupting, disturbing or otherwise impeding the orderly conduct of its meetings. § 54954.3(b). The right to publicly criticize a public official does not include the right to slander that official, though the line between criticism and slander is often difficult to determine in the heat of the moment. Care must be given to avoid violating the free speech rights of speakers by suppressing opinions relevant to the business of the legislative body.

Finally, in some circumstances, the use of profanity may serve as a basis for stopping a speaker. It will depend, however, upon what profane words or comments are made and the context of those comments. Therefore, no one should be ruled out of order for profanity unless the language both is truly objectionable and causes a disturbance or disruption in the proceeding.

The presiding officer of a legislative body may remove an individual from a meeting for actual disruptive behavior if they first warn the individual that their behavior is disruptive and that failure to cease their disruptive behavior could result in removal from the meeting. § 54957.95(a). Behavior is disruptive only if it actually disrupts, disturbs, impedes, or renders infeasible the orderly conduct of the meeting. § 54957.95(b)(1). Disruptive behavior may include noncompliance with the legislative body's established rules of decorum, such as speaking out of turn or exceeding established time limits on how long an individual can speak on a particular topic during public comment. § 54957.95(b)(1)(A). If the individual disrupting the meeting is using force or a true threat of force — meaning serious enough that a reasonable observer would perceive the threat to be an actual threat to use force by the person making the threat — they may be removed without a prior warning to cease their behavior. § 54957.95.

D. Additional Rights of the Public

The Brown Act grants the public the right to videotape or broadcast a public meeting, as well as the right to make a motion picture or still camera record of such meeting. § 54953.5(a). A legislative body may prohibit or limit recording of a meeting, however, if the body finds that the recording cannot continue without noise, illumination or view obstruction that constitutes, or would constitute, a disruption of the proceedings. § 54953.6.

Any audio or videotape record of an open and public meeting that is made, for whatever purpose, by or at the direction of the local agency is a public record and is

subject to inspection by the public consistent with the requirements of the Public Records Act. § 54953.5(b). The local agency must not destroy the tape or film record for at least 30 days following the date of the taping or recording. Inspection of the audiotape or videotape must be made available to the public for free on equipment provided by the local agency.

The Brown Act requires written material distributed to a majority of the body by any person to be provided to the public without delay. This rule is inapplicable, to attorney-client memoranda, the confidentiality of which was affirmed by the California Supreme Court in *Roberts v. City of Palmdale*, 5 Cal. 4th 363, 381 (1993). However, if non-privileged material is distributed during the meeting and prepared by the local agency, it must be available for public inspection at the meeting. If it is distributed during the meeting by a member of the public, it must be made available for public inspection after the meeting. § 54957.5(c).

If material related to an agenda item is distributed to a majority of the body less than 72 hours prior to an open session of a regular meeting, the writing must be made available at the same time for public inspection at a public office or location that has been designated in advance for such purpose. Each local agency must list the address of the designated office or location on the agendas for all meetings of the legislative body of that agency. § 54957.5(b). Although this Brown Act provision technically requires an agency to list the designated office address on closed session meeting agendas, it does not require an agency to make such closed session documents and materials available for public inspection.

A local agency may also post all documents made available for public inspection pursuant to Section 54957.5(b) on the agency's Internet Web site. However, a local agency may not post the writings to its website in lieu of designating a public office or location for inspection of physical copies of the documents.

There is a limited exception for certain supplemental materials to the requirement described above regarding making a writing distributed to a majority of the legislative body less than 72 hours in advance of a meeting immediately available for public inspection at a physical location. § 54957.5(b)(2)(B). The exception only applies to materials that are supplementing an initial staff report or similar document containing an executive summary and the staff recommendation, if any, relating to that agenda item that was made available for public inspection at the office or location designated at least 72 hours before the meeting. The exception allows the agency to make the materials available for public inspection the next business day commencing at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting during regular hours if the agency posts the materials on the agency's website immediately upon distributing them to the majority of the body, making it clear they relate to the item at the upcoming meeting, and the agenda posted for all meetings of the legislative body contains the agency's website address.

We recommend that local agencies implement the following procedures to comply with Section 54957.5(b):

- Place a binder at the agency's principal place of business next to the public counter agenda packet that identifies the contents as follows: "Disclosable public documents related to an open session agenda item on the ____ Agenda Packet distributed by the [AGENCY] to a majority of the [LEGISLATIVE BODY] less than 72 hours prior to the meeting."
- On the agenda template for all meetings, there should be a standard footer or statement that indicates the following: "Any disclosable public writings related to an open session item on a regular meeting agenda and distributed by the [AGENCY] to at least a majority of the [LEGISLATIVE BODY] less than 72 hours prior to that meeting are available for public inspection at the ____ Counter at [AGENCY'S PLACE OF BUSINESS] located at [ADDRESS] and [optional] the ____ Counter at the ____ Library located at [LIBRARY ADDRESS] during normal business hours. [Optional] In addition, the Agency may also post such documents on the Agency's Website at [WEBSITE ADDRESS]." Agencies should make these documents available online to the greatest extent possible, when public buildings or facilities are temporarily closed to public access.
- On the agency's website, create a subfolder under the agenda packet folder that identifies the contents of the subfolder as follows: "Disclosable public documents related to an open session agenda item on the ____ Agenda Packet distributed by the [AGENCY] to a majority of the [LEGISLATIVE BODY] less than 72 hours prior to the meeting."
- On all documents made available for public inspection pursuant to Section 54957.5(b), make a notation of the date when distributed to at least a majority of the legislative body and placed in the binder at agency's place of business, [optional] the Library, or [optional] on the agency's Website.
- Charge customary photocopying charges for copies of such documents.

One problem left unaddressed by Section 54957.5(b) is what to do when written materials are distributed directly to a majority of the legislative body without knowledge of staff, or even without the legislative body members knowing that a majority has received it. The law still requires these materials to be treated as public records. Thus, it is a good idea for at least one member of the legislative body to ensure that staff gets a copy of any document distributed to members of the legislative body so that copies can be made for the local agency's records and for members of the public who request a copy.

X. CLOSED SESSIONS

The Brown Act allows a legislative body to convene a "closed session" during a meeting in order to meet privately with its advisors on specifically enumerated topics. Sometimes people refer to closed sessions as "executive sessions," which is a holdover term from the statute's early days. Examples of business that may be conducted in closed session

include personnel actions and evaluations, threats to public safety, labor negotiations, pending litigation, real estate negotiations and consideration of a response to an audit report. §§ 54956.8, 54956.9, 54957, 54957.6, 54956.75. Political sensitivity of an item is not a lawful reason for a closed session discussion.

The Brown Act requires that closed session business be described on the public agenda. For a litigation threat against a city made outside an open and public meeting to be discussed in closed session it must be included in the agenda packet made available upon request before the meeting. *Fowler v. City of Lafayette*, 46 Cal. App. 5th 360, 370 (2020), *as modified on denial of reh'g* (Mar. 11, 2020), *review denied* (July 22, 2020).

Moreover, there is a "safe harbor" for using prescribed language to describe closed session items on an agenda in that legal challenges to the adequacy of the description are precluded when such language is used. § 54954.5. This so-called "safe harbor" encourages many local agencies to use a very similar agenda format, especially in light of a California Court of Appeal ruling that a local agency substantially complied with the Brown Act's requirement to describe closed session agenda items even though the notice referred to the wrong subsection of Section 54956.9. *Castaic Lake Water Agency v. Newhall County Water District*, 238 Cal.App. 4th 1196, 1207 (2015). Audio recording of closed sessions is not required unless a court orders such recording after finding a closed session violation. § 54960.

Closed sessions may be started in a location different from the usual meeting place as long as the location is noted on the agenda and the public can be present when the meeting first begins. Moreover, public comment on closed session items must be allowed before convening the closed session.

After a closed session, the legislative body must reconvene the public meeting and publicly report certain types of actions if they were taken and the vote on those actions. § 54957.1. There are limited exceptions for specified litigation decisions and to protect the victims of sexual misconduct or child abuse. Contracts, settlement agreements or other documents that are finally approved or adopted in closed session must be provided at the time the closed session ends to any person who has made a standing request for all documentation in connection with a request for notice of meetings (typically members of the media) and to any person who makes a request within 24 hours of the posting of the agenda, if the requestor is present when the closed session ends. § 54957.1.

One perennial area of confusion is whether a legislative body may discuss the salary and benefits of an individual employee (such as a city manager) as part of a performance evaluation session under Section 54957. It may not. However, the body may designate a negotiator or negotiators, such as two members of a five-member legislative body, to negotiate with that employee and then meet with the negotiator(s) in closed session under Section 54957.6 to provide directions on salary and compensation issues. The employee in question may not be present in such a closed session. The Brown Act prohibits attendees from disclosing confidential information obtained during a closed session, unless the legislative body authorizes the disclosure. Violations can be addressed through injunctions, disciplinary action, and referral to the grand jury. § 54963.

XI. ENFORCEMENT

There are both civil remedies and criminal misdemeanor penalties for Brown Act violations. The civil remedies include injunctions against further violations, orders nullifying any unlawful action, orders determining that an alleged act violated the Brown Act, orders determining the validity of any rule to penalize or discourage the expression of a member of the legislative body, and remedies for breaching closed session confidences. §§ 54960, 54960.1, 54960.2, 54963.

The procedures for claiming there was a Brown Act violation vary depending upon what the complaining party is seeking. If the complaining party is seeking to invalidate an action based on a violation of the Brown Act, the procedures for doing so are set forth in Section 54960.1, as summarized below. If the complaining party is merely seeking a determination that a Brown Act violation occurred or desires the court to impose an order preventing further violations, the procedures for doing so are set forth in Section 54960.2, also as summarized below.

Under Section 54960.1, prior to filing suit to obtain a judicial determination that an action is null and void because of an alleged Brown Act violation, the complaining party must make a written demand on the legislative body to cure or correct the alleged violation. § 54960.1(b). The written demand must be made within 90 days after the challenged action was taken. However, if the challenged action was taken in open session and involves a violation of the agenda requirements of Section 54954.2, then the written demand must be made within 30 days. § 54960.1(c)(1). The legislative body is required to cure or correct the challenged action and inform the party who filed the demand of its correcting actions or its decision not to cure or correct, within 30 days. § 54960.1(c)(2). The complaining party must file suit within 15 days after receipt of the written notice from the legislative body or if there is no written response, within 15 days after the 30-day cure period expires. § 54960.1(c). Under Section 54960.2, prior to filing suit to obtain a judicial determination that an alleged Brown Act violation occurred after January 1, 2013, the district attorney or interested person must submit a cease and desist letter to the legislative body clearly describing the legislative body's past action and the nature of the alleged violation within nine months of the alleged violation. § 54960.2(a). Second, the legislative body may respond within 30 days, including responding with an unconditional commitment to cease and desist from, and not repeat the past action that is alleged to violate the Brown Act. § 54960.2(b). If the legislative agency responds with an unconditional commitment, that commitment must be approved by the legislative body in open session at a regular or special meeting as a separate item of business not on the consent calendar and must be in substantially the form set forth in Section 54960.2(c)(1). Also, a legislative body may resolve to rescind an unconditional commitment with proper notice to the public and to each person to whom the unconditional commitment was made. § 54960.2(e). Upon rescission, the district attorney or any interested person may file an action pursuant to Section 54960(a). Finally, Section 54960.2 provides further deadlines and requirements that must be met when filing an action in connection with an unconditional commitment. § 54960.2. Note that even where a plaintiff can satisfy the threshold procedural requirements, a Brown Act violation will not automatically invalidate the action taken by the legislative body absent a

showing that the violation caused prejudice. *Martis Camp Cmty. Ass'n v. Cty. of Placer*, 53 Cal. App. 5th 569, 592 (2020).

A member of a legislative body will not be criminally liable for a violation of the Brown Act unless the member intends to deprive the public of information which the member knows or has reason to know the public is entitled to under the Brown Act. § 54959. This standard became effective in 1994 and is a different standard from most criminal standards. Until it is applied and interpreted by a court, it is not clear what type of evidence will be necessary to prosecute a Brown Act violation.

XII. CONCLUSION

The Brown Act's many rules and ambiguities can be confusing, and compliance with it can be difficult. In the event that you have any questions regarding any provision of the law, you should contact your legal counsel for advice.

PART TWO:

THE RALPH M. BROWN ACT

Updated including changes effective January 1, 2024

The Ralph M. Brown Act

Government Code §§ 54950-54963

Section 54950. Declaration of public policy

In enacting this chapter, the Legislature finds and declares that the public commissions, boards and councils and the other public agencies in this State exist to aid in the conduct of the people's business. It is the intent of the law that their actions be taken openly and that their deliberations be conducted openly.

The people of this State do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies which serve them. The people, in delegating authority, do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know. The people insist on remaining informed so that they may retain control over the instruments they have created.

Section 54950.5. Title of act

This chapter shall be known as the Ralph M. Brown Act.

Section 54951. "Local agency"

As used in this chapter, "local agency" means a county, city, whether general law or chartered, city and county, town, school district, municipal corporation, district, political subdivision, or any board, commission or agency thereof or other local public agency.

Section 54952. "Legislative body"

As used in this chapter, "legislative body" means:

(a) The governing body of a local agency or any other local body created by state or federal statute.

(b) A commission, committee, board or other body of a local agency, whether permanent or temporary, decision making or advisory, created by charter, ordinance, resolution or formal action of a legislative body. However, advisory committees, composed solely of the members of the legislative body that are less than a quorum of the legislative body are not legislative bodies, except that standing committees of a legislative body, irrespective of their composition which have a continuing subject matter jurisdiction, or a meeting schedule fixed by charter, ordinance, resolution or formal action of a legislative body are legislative bodies for purposes of this chapter.

(c) (1) A board, commission, committee or other multimember body that governs a private corporation, limited liability company or other entity that either:

(A) Is created by the elected legislative body in order to exercise authority that may lawfully be delegated by the elected governing body to a private corporation, limited liability company or other entity.

(B) Receives funds from a local agency and the membership of whose governing body includes a member of the legislative body of the local agency appointed to that governing body as a full-voting member by the legislative body of the local agency.

(2) Notwithstanding subparagraph (B) of paragraph (1), no board, commission, committee or other multimember body that governs a private corporation, limited liability company or other entity that receives funds from a local agency and, as of February 9, 1996, has a member of the legislative body of the local agency as a full voting member of the governing body of that private corporation, limited liability company or other entity shall be relieved from the public meeting requirements of this chapter by virtue of a change in status of the full-voting member to a nonvoting member.

(d) The lessee of any hospital, the whole or part of which is first leased pursuant to subdivision (p) of Section 32121 of the Health and Safety Code after January 1, 1994, where the lessee exercises any material authority of a legislative body of a local agency delegated to it by that legislative body whether the lessee is organized and operated by the local agency or by a delegated authority.

Section 54952.1. Conduct and treatment of electee

Any person elected to serve as a member of a legislative body who has not yet assumed the duties of office shall conform his or her conduct to the requirements of this chapter and shall be treated for purposes of enforcement of this chapter as if he or she has already assumed office.

Section 54952.2. Prohibited communications of local agency's legislative body; social media; exclusions from this chapter

(a) As used in this chapter, "meeting" means any congregation of a majority of the members of a legislative body at the same time and location, including teleconference location as permitted by Section 54953, to hear, discuss, deliberate or take action on any item that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body.

(b) (1) A majority of the members of a legislative body shall not, outside a meeting authorized by this chapter, use a series of communications of any kind, directly or through intermediaries, to discuss, deliberate or take action on any item of business that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body.

(2) Paragraph (1) shall not be construed as preventing an employee or official of a local agency, from engaging in separate conversations or communications outside of a meeting authorized by this chapter with members of a legislative body in order to answer questions or provide information regarding a matter that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the local agency, if that person does not communicate to members

of the legislative body the comments or position of any other member or members of the legislative body.

(3) (A) Paragraph (1) shall not be construed as preventing a member of the legislative body from engaging in separate conversations or communications on an internet-based social media platform to answer questions, provide information to the public, or to solicit information from the public regarding a matter that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body provided that a majority of the members of the legislative body do not use the internet-based social media platform to discuss among themselves business of a specific nature that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body. A member of the legislative body shall not respond directly to any communication on an internet-based social media platform regarding a matter that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body that is made, posted, or shared by any other member of the legislative body.

(B) For purposes of this paragraph, all of the following definitions shall apply:

(i) "Discuss among themselves" means communications made, posted, or shared on an internet-based social media platform between members of a legislative body, including comments or use of digital icons that express reactions to communications made by other members of the legislative body.

(ii) "Internet-based social media platform" means an online service that is open and accessible to the public.

(iii) "Open and accessible to the public" means that members of the general public have the ability to access and participate, free of charge, in the social media platform without the approval of the social media platform or a person or entity other than the social media platform, including any forum and chatroom, and cannot be blocked from doing so, except when the internet-based social media platform determines that an individual violated its protocols or rules.

(c) Nothing in this section shall impose the requirements of this chapter upon any of the following:

(1) Individual contacts or conversations between a member of a legislative body and any other person that do not violate subdivision (b).

(2) The attendance of a majority of the members of a legislative body at a conference or similar gathering open to the public that involves a discussion of issues of general interest to the public or to public agencies of the type represented by the legislative body, provided that a majority of the members do not discuss among themselves, other than as part of the scheduled program, business of a specified nature that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the local agency. Nothing in this paragraph is intended to allow members of the public free admission to a conference or similar gathering at which the organizers have required other participants or registrants to pay fees or charges as a condition of attendance.

(3) The attendance of a majority of the members of a legislative body at an open and publicized meeting organized to address a topic of local community concern by a person or organization other than the local agency, provided that a majority of the members do not discuss among themselves, other than as part of the scheduled program, business of a specific nature that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body of the local agency.

(4) The attendance of a majority of the members of a legislative body at an open and noticed meeting of another body of the local agency or at an open and noticed meeting of a legislative body of another local agency, provided that a majority of the members do not discuss among themselves, other than as part of the scheduled meeting, business of a specific nature that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body of the local agency.

(5) The attendance of a majority of the members of a legislative body at a purely social or ceremonial occasion, provided that a majority of the members do not discuss among themselves business of a specific nature that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body of the local agency.

(6) The attendance of a majority of the members of a legislative body at an open and noticed meeting of a standing committee of that body, provided that the members of the legislative body who are not members of the standing committee attend only as observers.

(d) This section shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2026, and as of that date is repealed.

Section 54952.3. Simultaneous or serial order meetings authorized; Requirements; Compensation or stipends

(a) A legislative body that has convened a meeting and whose membership constitutes a quorum of any other legislative body may convene a meeting of that other legislative body, simultaneously or in serial order, only if a clerk or a member of the convened legislative body verbally announces, prior to convening any simultaneous or serial order meeting of that subsequent legislative body, the amount of compensation or stipend, if any, that each member will be entitled to receive as a result of convening the simultaneous or serial meeting of the subsequent legislative body and identifies that the compensation or stipend shall be provided as a result of convening a meeting for which each member is entitled to collect compensation or a stipend. However, the clerk or member of the legislative body shall not be required to announce the amount of compensation if the amount of compensation is prescribed in statute and no additional compensation has been authorized by a local agency.

(b) For purposes of this section, compensation and stipend shall not include amounts reimbursed for actual and necessary expenses incurred by a member in the performance of the member's official duties, including, but not limited to, reimbursement of expenses relating to travel, meals, and lodging.

Section 54952.6. “Action taken”

As used in this chapter, “action taken” means a collective decision made by a majority of the members of a legislative body, a collective commitment or promise by a majority of the members of a legislative body to make a positive or a negative decision, or an actual vote by a majority of the members of a legislative body when sitting as a body or entity, upon a motion, proposal, resolution, order or ordinance.

Section 54952.7. Copy of chapter to members of legislative body of local agencies

A legislative body of a local agency may require that a copy of this chapter be given to each member of the legislative body and any person elected to serve as a member of the legislative body who has not assumed the duties of office. An elected legislative body of a local agency may require that a copy of this chapter be given to each member of each legislative body all or a majority of whose members are appointed by or under the authority of the elected legislative body.

Section 54953. Requirement that meetings be open and public; Teleconferencing; Teleconference meetings by health authority

(a) All meetings of the legislative body of a local agency shall be open and public, and all persons shall be permitted to attend any meeting of the legislative body of a local agency, except as otherwise provided in this chapter.

(b) (1) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the legislative body of a local agency may use teleconferencing for the benefit of the public and the legislative body of a local agency in connection with any meeting or proceeding authorized by law. The teleconferenced meeting or proceeding shall comply with all otherwise applicable requirements of this chapter and all otherwise applicable provisions of law relating to a specific type of meeting or proceeding.

(2) Teleconferencing, as authorized by this section, may be used for all purposes in connection with any meeting within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body. If the legislative body of a local agency elects to use teleconferencing, the legislative body of a local agency shall comply with all of the following:

(A) All votes taken during a teleconferenced meeting shall be by roll call.

(B) The teleconferenced meetings shall be conducted in a manner that protects the statutory and constitutional rights of the parties or the public appearing before the legislative body of a local agency.

(C) The legislative body shall give notice of the meeting and post agendas as otherwise required by this chapter.

(D) The legislative body shall allow members of the public to access the meeting and the agenda shall provide an opportunity for members of the public to address the legislative body directly pursuant to Section 54954.3.

(3) If the legislative body of a local agency elects to use teleconferencing, it shall post agendas at all teleconference locations. Each teleconference location shall be identified in the notice and agenda of the meeting or proceeding and each teleconference location shall be accessible to the public. During the teleconference, at least a quorum of the members of the legislative body shall participate from locations within the boundaries of the territory over which the local agency exercises jurisdiction, except as provided in subdivisions (d) and (e).

(c) (1) No legislative body shall take action by secret ballot, whether preliminary or final.

(2) The legislative body of a local agency shall publicly report any action taken and the vote or abstention on that action of each member present for the action.

(3) Prior to taking final action, the legislative body shall orally report a summary of a recommendation for a final action on the salaries, salary schedules or compensation paid in the form of fringe benefits of a local agency executive, as defined in subdivision (d) of Section 3511.1, during the open meeting in which the final action is to be taken. This paragraph shall not affect the public's right under the California Public Records Act (Division 10 (commencing with Section 7920.000) of Title 1) to inspect or copy records created or received in the process of developing the recommendation.

(d) (1) Notwithstanding the provisions relating to a quorum in paragraph (3) of subdivision (b), if a health authority conducts a teleconference meeting, members who are outside the jurisdiction of the authority may be counted toward the establishment of a quorum when participating in the teleconference if at least 50 percent of the number of members that would establish a quorum are present within the boundaries of the territory over which the authority exercises jurisdiction, and the health authority provides a teleconference number and associated access codes, if any, that allows any person to call in to participate in the meeting and the number and access codes are identified in the notice and agenda of the meeting.

(2) Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed as discouraging health authority members from regularly meeting at a common physical site within the jurisdiction of the authority or from using teleconference locations within or near the jurisdiction of the authority. A teleconference meeting for which a quorum is established pursuant to this subdivision shall be subject to all other requirements of this section.

(3) For purposes of this subdivision, a health authority means any entity created pursuant to Sections 14018.7, 14087.31, 14087.35, 14087.36, 14087.38 and 14087.9605 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, any joint powers authority created pursuant to Article 1 (commencing with Section 6500) of Chapter 5 of Division 7 for the purpose of contracting pursuant to Section 14087.3 of the Welfare and Institutions Code and any advisory committee to a county-sponsored health plan licensed pursuant to Chapter 2.2 (commencing with Section 1340) of Division 2 of the Health and Safety Code if the advisory committee has 12 or more members.

(e) (1) The legislative body of a local agency may use teleconferencing without complying with the requirements of paragraph (3) of subdivision (b) if the legislative body complies with the requirements of paragraph (2) of this subdivision in either of the following circumstances:

(A) The legislative body holds a meeting during a proclaimed state of emergency for the purpose of determining, by majority vote, whether as a result of the emergency, meeting in person would present imminent risks to the health or safety of attendees.

(B) The legislative body holds a meeting during a proclaimed state of emergency and has determined, by majority vote, pursuant to subparagraph (A), that, as a result of the emergency, meeting in person would present imminent risks to the health or safety of attendees.

(2) A legislative body that holds a meeting pursuant to this subdivision shall do all of the following:

(A) In each instance in which notice of the time of the teleconferenced meeting is otherwise given or the agenda for the meeting is otherwise posted, the legislative body shall also give notice of the means by which members of the public may access the meeting and offer public comment. The agenda shall identify and include an opportunity for all persons to attend via a call-in option or an internet-based service option.

(B) In the event of a disruption that prevents the legislative body from broadcasting the meeting to members of the public using the call-in option or internet-based service option, or in the event of a disruption within the local agency's control that prevents members of the public from offering public comments using the call-in option or internet-based service option, the legislative body shall take no further action on items appearing on the meeting agenda until public access to the meeting via the call-in option or internet-based service option is restored. Actions taken on agenda items during a disruption that prevents the legislative body from broadcasting the meeting may be challenged pursuant to Section 54960.1.

(C) The legislative body shall not require public comments to be submitted in advance of the meeting and must provide an opportunity for the public to address the legislative body and offer comment in real time.

(D) Notwithstanding Section 54953.3, an individual desiring to provide public comment through the use of an internet website, or other online platform, not under the control of the local legislative body, that requires registration to log in to a teleconference may be required to register as required by the third-party internet website or online platform to participate.

(E) (i) A legislative body that provides a timed public comment period for each agenda item shall not close the public comment period for the agenda

item, or the opportunity to register, pursuant to subparagraph (D), to provide public comment until that timed public comment period has elapsed.

(ii) A legislative body that does not provide a timed public comment period, but takes public comment separately on each agenda item, shall allow a reasonable amount of time per agenda item to allow public members the opportunity to provide public comment, including time for members of the public to register pursuant to subparagraph (D), or otherwise be recognized for the purpose of providing public comment.

(iii) A legislative body that provides a timed general public comment period that does not correspond to a specific agenda item shall not close the public comment period or the opportunity to register, pursuant to subparagraph (D), until the timed general public comment period has elapsed.

(3) If a state of emergency remains active, in order to continue to teleconference without compliance with paragraph (3) of subdivision (b), the legislative body shall, not later than 45 days after teleconferencing for the first time pursuant to subparagraph (A) or (B) of paragraph (1), and every 45 days thereafter, make the following findings by majority vote:

(A) The legislative body has reconsidered the circumstances of the state of emergency.

(B) The state of emergency continues to directly impact the ability of the members to meet safely in person.

(4) This subdivision shall not be construed to require the legislative body to provide a physical location from which the public may attend or comment.

(f) (1) The legislative body of a local agency may use teleconferencing without complying with paragraph (3) of subdivision (b) if, during the teleconference meeting, at least a quorum of the members of the legislative body participates in person from a singular physical location clearly identified on the agenda, which location shall be open to the public and situated within the boundaries of the territory over which the local agency exercises jurisdiction and the legislative body complies with all of the following:

(A) The legislative body shall provide at least one of the following as a means by which the public may remotely hear and visually observe the meeting, and remotely address the legislative body:

(i) A two-way audiovisual platform.

(ii) A two-way telephonic service and a live webcasting of the meeting.

(B) In each instance in which notice of the time of the teleconferenced meeting is otherwise given or the agenda for the meeting is otherwise posted, the

legislative body shall also give notice of the means by which members of the public may access the meeting and offer public comment.

(C) The agenda shall identify and include an opportunity for all persons to attend and address the legislative body directly pursuant to Section 54954.3 via a call-in option, via an internet-based service option, and at the in-person location of the meeting.

(D) In the event of a disruption that prevents the legislative body from broadcasting the meeting to members of the public using the call-in option or internet-based service option, or in the event of a disruption within the local agency's control that prevents members of the public from offering public comments using the call-in option or internet-based service option, the legislative body shall take no further action on items appearing on the meeting agenda until public access to the meeting via the call-in option or internet-based service option is restored. Actions taken on agenda items during a disruption that prevents the legislative body from broadcasting the meeting may be challenged pursuant to Section 54960.1.

(E) The legislative body shall not require public comments to be submitted in advance of the meeting and must provide an opportunity for the public to address the legislative body and offer comment in real time.

(F) Notwithstanding Section 54953.3, an individual desiring to provide public comment through the use of an internet website, or other online platform, not under the control of the local legislative body, that requires registration to log in to a teleconference may be required to register as required by the third-party internet website or online platform to participate.

(2) A member of the legislative body shall only participate in the meeting remotely pursuant to this subdivision, if all of the following requirements are met:

(A) One of the following circumstances applies:

(i) The member notifies the legislative body at the earliest opportunity possible, including at the start of a regular meeting, of their need to participate remotely for just cause, including a general description of the circumstances relating to their need to appear remotely at the given meeting. The provisions of this clause shall not be used by any member of the legislative body for more than two meetings per calendar year.

(ii) The member requests the legislative body to allow them to participate in the meeting remotely due to emergency circumstances and the legislative body takes action to approve the request. The legislative body shall request a general description of the circumstances relating to their need to appear remotely at the given meeting. A general description of an item generally need not exceed 20 words and shall not require the member to disclose any medical diagnosis or disability, or any personal medical information that is already exempt under existing law, such as the Confidentiality of Medical Information Act (Chapter 1 (commencing with Section 56) of Part 2.6 of

Division 1 of the Civil Code). For the purposes of this clause, the following requirements apply:

(I) A member shall make a request to participate remotely at a meeting pursuant to this clause as soon as possible. The member shall make a separate request for each meeting in which they seek to participate remotely.

(II) The legislative body may take action on a request to participate remotely at the earliest opportunity. If the request does not allow sufficient time to place proposed action on such a request on the posted agenda for the meeting for which the request is made, the legislative body may take action at the beginning of the meeting in accordance with paragraph (4) of subdivision (b) of Section 54954.2.

(B) The member shall publicly disclose at the meeting before any action is taken, whether any other individuals 18 years of age or older are present in the room at the remote location with the member, and the general nature of the member's relationship with any such individuals.

(C) The member shall participate through both audio and visual technology.

(3) The provisions of this subdivision shall not serve as a means for any member of a legislative body to participate in meetings of the legislative body solely by teleconference from a remote location for a period of more than three consecutive months or 20 percent of the regular meetings for the local agency within a calendar year, or more than two meetings if the legislative body regularly meets fewer than 10 times per calendar year.

(g) The legislative body shall have and implement a procedure for receiving and swiftly resolving requests for reasonable accommodation for individuals with disabilities, consistent with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. Sec. 12132), and resolving any doubt in favor of accessibility. In each instance in which notice of the time of the meeting is otherwise given or the agenda for the meeting is otherwise posted, the legislative body shall also give notice of the procedure for receiving and resolving requests for accommodation.

(h) The legislative body shall conduct meetings subject to this chapter consistent with applicable civil rights and nondiscrimination laws.

(i) (1) Nothing in this section shall prohibit a legislative body from providing the public with additional teleconference locations.

(2) Nothing in this section shall prohibit a legislative body from providing members of the public with additional physical locations in which the public may observe and address the legislative body by electronic means.

(j) For the purposes of this section, the following definitions shall apply:

(1) "Emergency circumstances" means a physical or family medical emergency that prevents a member from attending in person.

(2) "Just cause" means any of the following:

(A) A childcare or caregiving need of a child, parent, grandparent, grandchild, sibling, spouse, or domestic partner that requires them to participate remotely. "Child," "parent," "grandparent," "grandchild," and "sibling" have the same meaning as those terms do in Section 12945.2.

(B) A contagious illness that prevents a member from attending in person.

(C) A need related to a physical or mental disability as defined in Sections 12926 and 12926.1 not otherwise accommodated by subdivision (g).

(D) Travel while on official business of the legislative body or another state or local agency.

(3) "Remote location" means a location from which a member of a legislative body participates in a meeting pursuant to subdivision (f), other than any physical meeting location designated in the notice of the meeting. Remote locations need not be accessible to the public.

(4) "Remote participation" means participation in a meeting by teleconference at a location other than any physical meeting location designated in the notice of the meeting. Watching or listening to a meeting via webcasting or another similar electronic medium that does not permit members to interactively hear, discuss, or deliberate on matters, does not constitute remote participation.

(5) "State of emergency" means a state of emergency proclaimed pursuant to Section 8625 of the California Emergency Services Act (Article 1 (commencing with Section 8550) of Chapter 7 of Division 1 of Title 2).

(6) "Teleconference" means a meeting of a legislative body, the members of which are in different locations, connected by electronic means, through either audio or video, or both.

(7) "Two-way audiovisual platform" means an online platform that provides participants with the ability to participate in a meeting via both an interactive video conference and a two-way telephonic function.

(8) "Two-way telephonic service" means a telephone service that does not require internet access, is not provided as part of a two-way audiovisual platform, and allows participants to dial a telephone number to listen and verbally participate.

(9) "Webcasting" means a streaming video broadcast online or on television, using streaming media technology to distribute a single content source to many simultaneous listeners and viewers.

(k) This section shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2026, and as of that date is repealed.

Section 54953.1. Grand jury testimony

The provisions of this chapter shall not be construed to prohibit the members of the legislative body of a local agency from giving testimony in private before a grand jury, either as individuals or as a body.

Section 54953.2. Meetings to conform to Americans with Disabilities Act

All meetings of a legislative body of a local agency that are open and public shall meet the protections and prohibitions contained in Section 202 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. Sec. 12132), and the federal rules and regulations adopted in implementation thereof.

Section 54953.3. Registration of attendance

A member of the public shall not be required, as a condition to attendance at a meeting of a legislative body of a local agency, to register his or her name, to provide other information, to complete a questionnaire or otherwise to fulfill any condition precedent to his or her attendance.

If an attendance list, register, questionnaire or other similar document is posted at or near the entrance to the room where the meeting is to be held or is circulated to the persons present during the meeting, it shall state clearly that the signing, registering or completion of the document is voluntary and that all persons may attend the meeting regardless of whether a person signs, registers or completes the document.

Section 54953.5. Recording proceedings

(a) Any person attending an open and public meeting of a legislative body of a local agency shall have the right to record the proceedings with an audio or video recorder or a still or motion picture camera in the absence of a reasonable finding by the legislative body of the local agency that the recording cannot continue without noise, illumination or obstruction of view that constitutes, or would constitute, a persistent disruption of the proceedings.

(b) Any audio or video recording of an open and public meeting made for whatever purpose by, or at the direction of the local agency, shall be subject to inspection pursuant to the California Public Records Act (Division 10 (commencing with Section 7920.000) of Title 1), but, notwithstanding Section 34090, may be erased or destroyed 30 days after the recording. Any inspection of an audio or video recording shall be provided without charge on equipment made available by the local agency.

Section 54953.6. Restrictions on broadcasts of proceedings

No legislative body of a local agency shall prohibit or otherwise restrict the broadcast of its open and public meetings in the absence of a reasonable finding that the broadcast cannot be accomplished without noise, illumination or obstruction of view that would constitute a persistent disruption of the proceedings.

Section 54953.7. Access to meetings beyond minimal standards

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, legislative bodies of local agencies may impose requirements upon themselves which allow greater access to their meetings than prescribed by the minimal standards set forth in this chapter. In addition thereto, an elected legislative body of a local agency may impose such requirements on those appointed legislative bodies of the local agency of which all or a majority of the members are appointed by or under the authority of the elected legislative body.

Section 54953.8. Open meetings: teleconferences: neighborhood councils

(a)(1) An eligible legislative body may use teleconferencing without complying with paragraph (3) of subdivision (b) of Section 54953 if the eligible legislative body complies with paragraphs (2) to (4), inclusive.

(2) An eligible legislative body may only use teleconferencing as described in this section after all the following have occurred:

(A) The city council for a city described in subdivision (c) considers whether to adopt a resolution to authorize eligible legislative bodies to use teleconferencing as described in paragraph (1) at an open and regular meeting.

(B) If the city council adopts a resolution described in subparagraph (A), an eligible legislative body may elect to use teleconferencing pursuant to this section if two-thirds of the eligible legislative body votes to do so. The eligible legislative body shall notify the city council if it elects to use teleconferencing pursuant to this section and its justification for doing so.

(C) Upon receiving notification from a legislative body as described in subparagraph (B), the city council may adopt a resolution to prohibit the eligible legislative body from using teleconferencing pursuant to this section.

(3) After completing the requirements in paragraph (2), an eligible legislative body that holds a meeting pursuant to this subdivision shall do all of the following:

(A) In each instance in which notice of the time of the teleconferenced meeting is otherwise given or the agenda for the meeting is otherwise posted, the eligible legislative body shall also give notice of the means by which members of the public may access the meeting and offer public comment. The agenda shall identify and include an opportunity for all persons to attend via a call-in option or an internet-based service option.

(B) In the event of a disruption that prevents the eligible legislative body from broadcasting the meeting to members of the public using the call-in option or internet-based service option, or in the event of a disruption within the eligible legislative body's control that prevents members of the public from offering public comments using the call-in option or internet-based service option, the eligible legislative body shall take no further action on items appearing on the meeting agenda until public access to the meeting via the call-in option or internet-based service option is restored. Actions taken on agenda items during a disruption that prevents the eligible legislative body from broadcasting the meeting may be challenged pursuant to Section 54960.1.

(C) The eligible legislative body shall not require public comments to be submitted in advance of the meeting and shall provide an opportunity for the public to address the legislative body and offer comment in real time.

(D) Notwithstanding Section 54953.3, an individual desiring to provide public comment through the use of an internet website, or other online platform, not under the control of the eligible legislative body, that requires registration to log in to a teleconference may be required to register as required by the third-party internet website or online platform to participate.

(E) (i) An eligible legislative body that provides a timed public comment period for each agenda item shall not close the public comment period for the agenda item, or the opportunity to register, pursuant to subparagraph (D), to provide public comment until that timed public comment period has elapsed.

(ii) An eligible legislative body that does not provide a timed public comment period, but takes public comment separately on each agenda item, shall allow a reasonable amount of time per agenda item to allow public members the opportunity to provide public comment, including time for members of the public to register pursuant to subparagraph (D), or otherwise be recognized for the purpose of providing public comment.

(iii) An eligible legislative body that provides a timed general public comment period that does not correspond to a specific agenda item shall not close the public comment period or the opportunity to register, pursuant to subparagraph (D), until the timed general public comment period has elapsed.

(F) At least a quorum of the members of the eligible legislative body shall participate from locations within the boundaries of the city in which the eligible legislative body is established.

(G) At least once per year, at least a quorum of the members of the eligible legislative body shall participate in person from a singular physical location that is open to the public and within the boundaries of the eligible legislative body.

(4) An eligible legislative body that holds a meeting pursuant to this subdivision shall do the following, as applicable:

(A) If the meeting is during regular business hours of the offices of the city council member that represents the area that includes the eligible legislative body, the eligible legislative body shall provide a publicly accessible physical location from which the public may attend or comment, which shall be the offices of the city council member who represents the area where the eligible legislative body is located, unless the eligible legislative body identifies an alternative location.

(B) If the meeting is outside regular business hours, the eligible legislative body shall make reasonable efforts to accommodate any member of the public that requests an accommodation to participate in the meeting. For the purposes of this subparagraph, "accommodation" means providing a publicly accessible physical location for the member of the public to participate from, providing access to technology necessary to participate in the meeting, or identifying locations or resources available that could provide the member of the public with an opportunity to participate in the meeting.

(b) The legislative body shall comply with all other requirements of Section 54953.

(c) As used in this section, "eligible legislative body" means a neighborhood council that is an advisory body with the purpose to promote more citizen participation in government and make government more responsive to local needs that is established pursuant to the charter of a city with a population of more than 3,000,000 people that is subject to this chapter.

(d) This section shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2026, and as of that date is repealed.

Section 54954. Rules for conduct of business; Time and place of meetings

(a) Each legislative body of a local agency, except for advisory committees or standing committees, shall provide by ordinance, resolution, bylaws or by whatever other rule is required for the conduct of business by that body, the time and place for holding regular meetings. Meetings of advisory committees or standing committees for which an agenda is posted at least 72 hours in advance of the meeting pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 54954.2, shall be considered for purposes of this chapter as regular meetings of the legislative body.

(b) Regular and special meetings of the legislative body shall be held within the boundaries of the territory over which the local agency exercises jurisdiction, except to do any of the following:

(1) Comply with state or federal law or court order, or attend a judicial or administrative proceeding to which the local agency is a party.

(2) Inspect real or personal property which cannot be conveniently brought within the boundaries of the territory over which the local agency exercises jurisdiction, provided that the topic of the meeting is limited to items directly related to the real or personal property.

(3) Participate in meetings or discussions of multiagency significance that are outside the boundaries of a local agency's jurisdiction. However, any meeting or discussion held pursuant to this subdivision shall take place within the jurisdiction of one of the participating local agencies and be noticed by all participating agencies as provided for in this chapter.

(4) Meet in the closest meeting facility if the local agency has no meeting facility within the boundaries of the territory over which the local agency exercises jurisdiction, or at the principal office of the local agency if that office is located outside the territory over which the agency exercises jurisdiction.

(5) Meet outside their immediate jurisdiction with elected or appointed officials of the United States or the State of California when a local meeting would be impractical solely to discuss a legislative or regulatory issue affecting the local agency and over which the federal or state officials have jurisdiction.

(6) Meet outside their immediate jurisdiction if the meeting takes place in or nearby a facility owned by the agency, provided that the topic of the meeting is limited to items directly related to the facility.

(7) Visit the office of the local agency's legal counsel for a closed session on pending litigation held pursuant to Section 54956.9, when to do so would reduce legal fees or costs.

(c) Meetings of the governing board of a school district shall be held within the district, except under the circumstances enumerated in subdivision (b) or to do any of the following:

(1) Attend a conference on non-adversarial collective bargaining techniques.

(2) Interview members of the public residing in another district with reference to the trustees' potential employment of an applicant for the position of the superintendent of the district.

(3) Interview a potential employee from another district.

(d) Meetings of a joint powers authority shall occur within the territory of at least one of its member agencies or as provided in subdivision (b). However, a joint powers authority which has members throughout the state may meet at any facility in the state which complies with the requirements of Section 54961.

(e) If, by reason of fire, flood, earthquake or other emergency, it shall be unsafe to meet in the place designated, the meetings shall be held for the duration of the emergency at the place designated by the presiding officer of the legislative body or his or her designee in a notice to the local media that have requested notice pursuant to Section 54956, by the most rapid means of communication available at the time.

Section 54954.1. Request for notice; Renewal; Fee

Any person may request that a copy of the agenda, or a copy of all the documents constituting the agenda packet, of any meeting of a legislative body be mailed to that person. If a local agency has an internet website, the legislative body or its designee shall email a copy of, or website link to, the agenda or a copy of all the documents constituting the agenda packet if the person requests that the item or items be delivered by email. If the local agency determines it is technologically infeasible to send a copy of all documents constituting the agenda packet or a link to a website that contains the documents by email or by other electronic means, the legislative body or its designee shall send by mail a copy of the agenda or a website link to the agenda and mail a copy of all other documents constituting the agenda packet in accordance with the mailing requirements established pursuant to this section. If requested, the agenda and documents in the agenda packet shall be made available in appropriate alternative formats to persons with a disability, as required by Section 202 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. Sec. 12132), and the federal rules and regulations adopted in implementation thereof. Upon receipt of the written request, the legislative body or its designee shall cause the requested materials to be mailed at the time the agenda is posted pursuant to Section 54954.2 and 54956 or upon distribution to all, or a majority of all, of the members of a legislative body, whichever occurs first. Any request for mailed copies of agendas or agenda packets shall be valid for the calendar year in which it is filed, and must be renewed following January 1 of each year. The legislative body may establish a fee for mailing the agenda or agenda packet, which fee shall not exceed the cost of providing the service. Failure of the requesting person to receive the agenda or agenda packet pursuant to this section shall not constitute grounds for invalidation of the actions of the legislative body taken at the meeting for which the agenda or agenda packet was not received.

Section 54954.2. Posting of agenda; Actions not on agenda

(a) (1) At least 72 hours before a regular meeting, the legislative body of the local agency, or its designee, shall post an agenda containing a brief general description of each item of business to be transacted or discussed at the meeting, including items to be discussed in closed session. A brief general description of an item generally need not exceed 20 words. The agenda shall specify the time and location of the regular meeting and shall be posted in a location that is freely accessible to members of the public and on the local agency's internet website, if the local agency has one. If requested, the agenda shall be made available in appropriate alternative formats to persons with a disability, as required by Section 202 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. Sec. 12132) and the federal rules and regulations adopted in implementation thereof. The agenda shall include information regarding how, to whom and when a request for disability-related modification or accommodation, including auxiliary aids or services, may be made by a person with a disability who requires a modification or accommodation in order to participate in the public meeting.

(2) For a meeting occurring on and after January 1, 2019 of a legislative body of a city, county, city and county, special district, school district or political subdivision established by the state that has an internet website, the following provisions shall apply:

(A) An online posting of an agenda shall be posted on the primary internet website home page of a city, county, city and county, special district, school district or political subdivision established by the state that is accessible through a prominent, direct link to the current agenda. The direct link to the agenda shall not be in a contextual menu; however, a link in addition to the direct link to the agenda may be accessible through a contextual menu.

(B) An online posting of an agenda, including, but not limited to, an agenda posted in an integrated agenda management platform shall be posted in an open format that meets all of the following requirements:

(i) Retrievable, downloadable, indexable and electronically searchable by commonly used internet search applications.

(ii) Platform independent and machine readable.

(iii) Available to the public free of charge and without any restriction that would impede the reuse or redistribution of the agenda.

(C) A legislative body of a city, county, city and county, special district, school district or political subdivision established by the state that has an internet website and an integrated agenda management platform shall not be required to comply with subparagraph (A) if all of the following are met:

(i) A direct link to the integrated agenda management platform shall be posted on the primary Internet website home page of a city, county, city and county, special district, school district or political subdivision established by the state. The direct link to the integrated agenda management platform shall not be in a contextual menu. When a person clicks on the direct link to the integrated agenda management platform, the direct link shall take the person directly to an internet website with the agendas of the legislative body of a city, county, city and county, special district, school district or political subdivision established by the state.

(ii) The integrated agenda management platform may contain the prior agendas of a legislative body of a city, county, city and county, special district, school district or political subdivision established by the state for all meetings occurring on or after January 1, 2019.

(iii) The current agenda of the legislative body of a city, county, city and county, special district, school district or political subdivision established by the state shall be the first agenda available at the top of the integrated agenda management platform.

(iv) All agendas posted in the integrated agenda management platform shall comply with the requirements in clauses (i), (ii) and (iii) of subparagraph (B).

(D) For the purposes of this paragraph, both of the following definitions shall apply:

(i) "Integrated agenda management platform" means an Internet Web site of a city, county, city and county, special district, school district or political subdivision established by the state dedicated to providing the entirety of the agenda information for the legislative body of the city, county, city and county, special district, school district or political subdivision established by the state to the public.

(ii) "Legislative body" has the same meaning as that term is used in subdivision (a) of Section 54952.

(E) The provisions of this paragraph shall not apply to a political subdivision of a local agency that was established by the legislative body of the city, county, city and county, special district, school district or political subdivision established by the state.

(3) No action or discussion shall be undertaken on any item not appearing on the posted agenda, except that members of a legislative body or its staff may briefly respond to statements made or questions posed by persons exercising their public testimony rights under Section 54954.3. In addition, on their own initiative or in response to questions posed by the public, a member of a legislative body or its staff may ask a question for clarification, make a brief announcement, or make a brief report on their own activities. Furthermore, a member of a legislative body, or the body itself, subject to rules or procedures of the legislative body, may provide a reference to staff or other resources for factual information, request staff to report back to the body at a subsequent meeting concerning any matter, or take action to direct staff to place a matter of business on a future agenda.

(b) Notwithstanding subdivision (a), the legislative body may take action on items of business not appearing on the posted agenda under any of the conditions stated below. Prior to discussing any item pursuant to this subdivision, the legislative body shall publicly identify the item.

(1) Upon a determination by a majority vote of the legislative body that an emergency situation exists as defined in Section 54956.5.

(2) Upon a determination by a two-thirds vote of the members of the legislative body present at the meeting, or, if less than two-thirds of the members are present, a unanimous vote of those members present that there is a need to take immediate action and that the need for action came to the attention of the local agency subsequent to the agenda being posted as specified in subdivision (a).

(3) The item was posted pursuant to subdivision (a) for a prior meeting of the legislative body occurring not more than five calendar days prior to the date action is taken on the item, and at the prior meeting the item was continued to the meeting at which action is being taken.

(4) To consider action on a request from a member to participate in a meeting remotely due to emergency circumstances, pursuant to Section 54953, if the request does not allow sufficient time to place the proposed action on the posted agenda for the meeting for which the request is made. The legislative body may approve such a request by a majority vote of the legislative body.

(c) This section is necessary to implement and reasonably within the scope of paragraph (1) of subdivision (b) of Section 3 of Article I of the California Constitution.

(d) For purposes of subdivision (a), the requirement that the agenda be posted on the local agency's internet website, if the local agency has one, shall only apply to a legislative body that meets either of the following standards:

(1) A legislative body as that term is defined by subdivision (a) of Section 54952.

(2) A legislative body as that term is defined by subdivision (b) of Section 54952, if the members of the legislative body are compensated for their appearance, and if one or more of the members of the legislative body are also members of a legislative body as that term is defined by subdivision (a) of Section 54952.

(e) This section shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2026, and as of that date is repealed.

Section 54954.3. Public testimony at regular meetings

(a) Every agenda for regular meetings shall provide an opportunity for members of the public to directly address the legislative body on any item of interest to the public, before or during the legislative body's consideration of the item that is within the subject matter jurisdiction of the legislative body, provided that no action shall be taken on any item not appearing on the agenda unless the action is otherwise authorized by subdivision (b) of Section 54954.2. However, the agenda need not provide an opportunity for members of the public to address the legislative body on any item that has already been considered by a committee, composed exclusively of members of the legislative body at a public meeting wherein all interested members of the public were afforded the opportunity to address the committee on the item, before or during the committee's consideration of the item, unless the item has been substantially changed since the committee heard the item, as determined by the legislative body. Every notice for a special meeting shall provide an opportunity for members of the public to directly address the legislative body concerning any item that has been described in the notice for the meeting before or during consideration of that item.

(b) (1) The legislative body of a local agency may adopt reasonable regulations to ensure that the intent of subdivision (a) is carried out, including, but not limited to,

regulations limiting the total amount of time allocated for public testimony on particular issues and for each individual speaker.

(2) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), when the legislative body of a local agency limits time for public comment, the legislative body of a local agency shall provide at least twice the allotted time to a member of the public who utilizes a translator to ensure that non-English speakers receive the same opportunity to directly address the legislative body of a local agency.

(3) Paragraph (2) shall not apply if the legislative body of a local agency utilizes simultaneous translation equipment in a manner that allows the legislative body of a local agency to hear the translated public testimony simultaneously.

(c) The legislative body of a local agency shall not prohibit public criticism of the policies, procedures, programs or services of the agency or of the acts or omissions of the legislative body. Nothing in this subdivision shall confer any privilege or protection for expression beyond that otherwise provided by law.

Section 54954.4. Legislative findings and declarations relating to reimbursements; Legislative intent; Review of claims

(a) The Legislature hereby finds and declares that Section 12 of Chapter 641 of the Statutes of 1986 authorizing reimbursement to local agencies and school districts for costs mandated by the state pursuant to that act, shall be interpreted strictly. The intent of the Legislature is to provide reimbursement for only those costs which are clearly and unequivocally incurred as the direct and necessary result of compliance with Chapter 641 of the Statutes of 1986.

(b) In this regard, the Legislature directs all state employees and officials involved in reviewing or authorizing claims for reimbursement or otherwise participating in the reimbursement process, to rigorously review each claim and authorize only those claims, or parts thereof, which represent costs which are clearly and unequivocally incurred as the direct and necessary result of compliance with Chapter 641 of the Statutes of 1986 and for which complete documentation exists. For purposes of Section 54954.2, costs eligible for reimbursement shall only include the actual cost to post a single agenda for any one meeting.

(c) The Legislature hereby finds and declares that complete, faithful and uninterrupted compliance with the Ralph M. Brown Act (Chapter 9 (commencing with Section 54950) of Part 1 of Division 2 of Title 5 of the Government Code) is a matter of overriding public importance. Unless specifically stated, no future Budget Act or related budget enactments, shall, in any manner, be interpreted to suspend, eliminate or otherwise modify the legal obligation and duty of local agencies to fully comply with Chapter 641 of the Statutes of 1986 in a complete, faithful and uninterrupted manner.

Section 54954.5. Description of closed session items

For purposes of describing closed session items pursuant to Section 54954.2, the agenda may describe closed sessions as provided below. No legislative body or elected official shall be in violation of Section 54954.2 or 54956 if the closed session items were described in substantial compliance with this section. Substantial compliance is satisfied by including the information provided below, irrespective of its format.

(a) With respect to a closed session held pursuant to Section 54956.7:

LICENSE/PERMIT DETERMINATION

Applicant(s): (Specify number of applicants)

(b) With respect to every item of business to be discussed in closed session pursuant to Section 54956.8:

CONFERENCE WITH REAL PROPERTY NEGOTIATORS

Property: (Specify street address, or if no street address, the parcel number or other unique reference of the real property under negotiation)

Agency negotiator: (Specify names of negotiators attending the closed session) (If circumstances necessitate the absence of a specified negotiator, an agent or designee may participate in place of the absent negotiator so long as the name of the agent or designee is announced at an open session held prior to the closed session.)

Negotiating parties: (Specify name of party (not agent))

Under negotiation: (Specify whether instruction to negotiator will concern price, terms of payment or both)

(c) With respect to every item of business to be discussed in closed session pursuant to Section 54956.9:

CONFERENCE WITH LEGAL COUNSEL -- EXISTING LITIGATION
(Paragraph (1) of subdivision (d) of Section 54956.9)

Name of case: (Specify by reference to claimant's name, names of parties, case or claim numbers)

or

Case name unspecified: (Specify whether disclosure would jeopardize service of process or existing settlement negotiations)

CONFERENCE WITH LEGAL COUNSEL -- ANTICIPATED LITIGATION

Significant exposure to litigation pursuant to paragraph (2) or (3) of subdivision (d) of Section 54956.9: (Specify number of potential cases)

(In addition to the information noticed above, the agency may be required to provide additional information on the agenda or in an oral statement prior to the closed session pursuant to paragraphs (2) to (5), inclusive of subdivision (e) of Section 54956.9.)

Initiation of litigation pursuant to paragraph (4) of subdivision (d) of Section 54956.9: (Specify number of potential cases)

(d) With respect to every item of business to be discussed in closed session pursuant to Section 54956.95:

LIABILITY CLAIMS

Claimant: (Specify name unless unspecified pursuant to Section 54961)

Agency claimed against: (Specify name)

(e) With respect to every item of business to be discussed in closed session pursuant to Section 54957:

THREAT TO PUBLIC SERVICES OR FACILITIES

Consultation with: (Specify name of law enforcement agency and title of officer, or name of applicable agency representative and title)

PUBLIC EMPLOYEE APPOINTMENT

Title: (Specify description of position to be filled)

PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT

Title: (Specify description of position to be filled)

PUBLIC EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Title: (Specify position title of employee being reviewed)

PUBLIC EMPLOYEE DISCIPLINE/DISMISSAL/RELEASE

(No additional information is required in connection with a closed session to consider discipline, dismissal, or release of a public employee. Discipline includes potential reduction of compensation.)

(f) With respect to every item of business to be discussed in closed session pursuant to Section 54957.6:

CONFERENCE WITH LABOR NEGOTIATORS

Agency designated representatives: (Specify names of designated representatives attending the closed session). (If circumstances necessitate the absence of a specified designated representative, an agent or designee may participate in place of the absent representative so long as the name of the agent or designee is announced at an open session held prior to the closed session).

Employee organization: (Specify name of organization representing employee or employees in question).

or

Unrepresented employee: (Specify position title of unrepresented employee who is the subject of the negotiations).

(g) With respect to closed sessions called pursuant to Section 54957.8:

CASE REVIEW/PLANNING

(No additional information is required in connection with a closed session to consider case review or planning).

(h) With respect to every item of business to be discussed in closed session pursuant to Sections 1461, 32106 and 32155 of the Health and Safety Code or Sections 37606 and 37624.3 of the Government Code:

REPORT INVOLVING TRADE SECRET

Discussion will concern: (Specify whether discussion will concern proposed new service, program or facility).

Estimated date of public disclosure: (Specify month and year).

HEARINGS

Subject matter: (Specify whether testimony/deliberation will concern staff privileges, report of medical audit committee, or report of quality assurance committee).

(i) With respect to every item of business to be discussed in closed session pursuant to Section 54956.86:

CHARGE OR COMPLAINT INVOLVING INFORMATION PROTECTED BY FEDERAL LAW

(No additional information is required in connection with a closed session to discuss a charge or complaint pursuant to Section 54956.86).

(j) With respect to every item of business to be discussed in closed session pursuant to Section 54956.96:

CONFERENCE INVOLVING A JOINT POWERS AGENCY (Specify by name)

Discussion will concern: (Specify closed session description used by the joint powers agency).

Name of local agency representative on joint powers agency board: (Specify name).

(Additional information listing the names of agencies or titles of representatives attending the closed session as consultants or other representatives).

(k) With respect to every item of business to be discussed in closed session pursuant to Section 54956.75:

AUDIT BY CALIFORNIA STATE AUDITOR'S OFFICE

Section 54954.6. Public meeting on general tax or assessment; Notice

(a) (1) Before adopting any new or increased general tax or any new or increased assessment, the legislative body of a local agency shall conduct at least one public meeting at which local officials shall allow public testimony regarding the proposed new or increased general tax or new or increased assessment in addition to the noticed public hearing at which the legislative body proposes to enact or increase the general tax or assessment.

For purposes of this section, the term "new or increased assessment" does not include any of the following:

(A) A fee that does not exceed the reasonable cost of providing the services, facilities or regulatory activity for which the fee is charged.

(B) A service charge, rate or charge, unless a special district's principal act requires the service charge, rate or charge to conform to the requirements of this section.

(C) An ongoing annual assessment if it is imposed at the same or lower amount as any previous year.

(D) An assessment that does not exceed an assessment formula or range of assessments previously specified in the notice given to the public pursuant to

subparagraph (G) of paragraph (2) of subdivision (c) and that was previously adopted by the agency or approved by the voters in the area where the assessment is imposed.

(E) Standby or immediate availability charges.

(2) The legislative body shall provide at least 45 days' public notice of the public hearing at which the legislative body proposes to enact or increase the general tax or assessment. The legislative body shall provide notice for the public meeting at the same time and in the same document as the notice for the public hearing, but the meeting shall occur prior to the hearing.

(b) (1) The joint notice of both the public meeting and the public hearing required by subdivision (a) with respect to a proposal for a new or increased general tax shall be accomplished by placing a display advertisement of at least one-eighth page in a newspaper of general circulation for three weeks pursuant to Section 6063 and by a first-class mailing to those interested parties who have filed a written request with the local agency for mailed notice of public meetings or hearings on new or increased general taxes. The public meeting pursuant to subdivision (a) shall take place no earlier than 10 days after the first publication of the joint notice pursuant to this subdivision. The public hearing shall take place no earlier than seven days after the public meeting pursuant to this subdivision. Notwithstanding paragraph (2) of subdivision (a), the joint notice need not include notice of the public meeting after the meeting has taken place. The public hearing pursuant to subdivision (a) shall take place no earlier than 45 days after the first publication of the joint notice pursuant to this subdivision. Any written request for mailed notices shall be effective for one year from the date on which it is filed unless a renewal request is filed. Renewal requests for mailed notices shall be filed on or before April 1 of each year. The legislative body may establish a reasonable annual charge for sending notices based on the estimated cost of providing the service.

(2) The notice required by paragraph (1) of this subdivision shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

(A) The amount or rate of the tax. If the tax is proposed to be increased from any previous year, the joint notice shall separately state both the existing tax rate and the proposed tax rate increase.

(B) The activity to be taxed.

(C) The estimated amount of revenue to be raised by the tax annually.

(D) The method and frequency for collecting the tax.

(E) The dates, times and locations of the public meeting and hearing described in subdivision (a).

(F) The telephone number and address of an individual, office or organization that interested persons may contact to receive additional information about the tax.

(c) (1) The joint notice of both the public meeting and the public hearing required by subdivision (a) with respect to a proposal for a new or increased assessment on real property or businesses shall be accomplished through a mailing, postage prepaid, in the United States mail and shall be deemed given when so deposited. The public meeting pursuant to subdivision (a) shall take place no earlier than 10 days after the joint mailing pursuant to this subdivision. The public hearing shall take place no earlier than seven days after the public meeting pursuant to this subdivision. The envelope or the cover of the mailing shall include the name of the local agency and the return address of the sender. This mailed notice shall be in at least 10-point type and shall be given to all property owners or business owners proposed to be subject to the new or increased assessment by a mailing by name to those persons whose names and addresses appear on the last equalized county assessment roll, the State Board of Equalization assessment roll or the local agency's records pertaining to business ownership, as the case may be.

(2) The joint notice required by paragraph (1) of this subdivision shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

(A) In the case of an assessment proposed to be levied on property, the estimated amount of the assessment per parcel. In the case of an assessment proposed to be levied on businesses, the proposed method and basis of levying the assessment in sufficient detail to allow each business owner to calculate the amount of assessment to be levied against each business. If the assessment is proposed to be increased from any previous year, the joint notice shall separately state both the amount of the existing assessment and the proposed assessment increase.

(B) A general description of the purpose or improvements that the assessment will fund.

(C) The address to which property owners may mail a protest against the assessment.

(D) The telephone number and address of an individual, office or organization that interested persons may contact to receive additional information about the assessment.

(E) A statement that a majority protest will cause the assessment to be abandoned if the assessment act used to levy the assessment so provides. Notice shall also state the percentage of protests required to trigger an election, if applicable.

(F) The dates, times and locations of the public meeting and hearing described in subdivision (a).

(G) A proposed assessment formula or range as described in subparagraph (D) of paragraph (1) of subdivision (a) if applicable and that is noticed pursuant to this section.

(3) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), in the case of an assessment that is proposed exclusively for operation and maintenance expenses imposed throughout the

entire local agency or exclusively for operation and maintenance assessments proposed to be levied on 50,000 parcels or more, notice may be provided pursuant to this subdivision or pursuant to paragraph (1) of subdivision (b) and shall include the estimated amount of the assessment of various types, amounts or uses of property and the information required by subparagraphs (B) to (G), inclusive, of paragraph (2) of subdivision (c).

(4) Notwithstanding paragraph (1), in the case of an assessment proposed to be levied pursuant to Part 2 (commencing with Section 22500) of Division 2 of the Streets and Highways Code by a regional park district, regional park and open-space district or regional open-space district formed pursuant to Article 3 (commencing with Section 5500) of Chapter 3 of Division 5 of, or pursuant to Division 26 (commencing with Section 35100) of the Public Resources Code, notice may be provided pursuant to paragraph (1) of subdivision (b).

(d) The notice requirements imposed by this section shall be construed as additional to, and not to supersede existing provisions of law, and shall be applied concurrently with the existing provisions so as to not delay or prolong the governmental decision making process.

(e) This section shall not apply to any new or increased general tax or any new or increased assessment that requires an election of either of the following:

- (1) The property owners subject to the assessment.
- (2) The voters within the local agency imposing the tax or assessment.

(f) Nothing in this section shall prohibit a local agency from holding a consolidated meeting or hearing at which the legislative body discusses multiple tax or assessment proposals.

(g) The local agency may recover the reasonable costs of public meetings, public hearings and notice required by this section from the proceeds of the tax or assessment. The costs recovered for these purposes, whether recovered pursuant to this subdivision or any other provision of law, shall not exceed the reasonable costs of the public meetings, public hearings and notice.

(h) Any new or increased assessment that is subject to the notice and hearing provisions of Article XIII C or XIII D of the California Constitution is not subject to the notice and hearing requirements of this section.

Section 54955. Adjournment of meetings

The legislative body of a local agency may adjourn any regular, adjourned regular, special or adjourned special meeting to a time and place specified in the order of adjournment. Less than a quorum may so adjourn from time to time. If all members are absent from any regular or adjourned regular meeting, the clerk or secretary of the legislative body may declare the meeting adjourned to a stated time and place and he

or she shall cause a written notice of the adjournment to be given in the same manner as provided in Section 54956 for special meetings, unless such notice is waived as provided for special meetings. A copy of the order or notice of adjournment shall be conspicuously posted on or near the door of the place where the regular, adjourned regular, special or adjourned special meeting was held within 24 hours after the time of the adjournment. When a regular or adjourned regular meeting is adjourned as provided in this section, the resulting adjourned regular meeting is a regular meeting for all purposes. When an order of adjournment of any meeting fails to state the hour at which the adjourned meeting is to be held, it shall be held at the hour specified for regular meetings by ordinance, resolution, bylaw or other rule.

Section 54955.1. Continuance of hearing

Any hearing being held, or noticed or ordered to be held by a legislative body of a local agency at any meeting may by order or notice of continuance be continued or re-continued to any subsequent meeting of the legislative body in the same manner and to the same extent set forth in Section 54955 for the adjournment of meetings; provided, that if the hearing is continued to a time less than 24 hours after the time specified in the order or notice of hearing, a copy of the order or notice of continuance of hearing shall be posted immediately following the meeting at which the order or declaration of continuance was adopted or made.

Section 54956. Special meetings; call; notice; meetings regarding local agency executive salaries, salary schedules or compensation in form of fringe benefits; posting on Internet Web site

(a) A special meeting may be called at any time by the presiding officer of the legislative body of a local agency or by a majority of the members of the legislative body, by delivering written notice to each member of the legislative body and to each local newspaper of general circulation and radio or television station requesting notice in writing and posting a notice on the local agency's Internet Web site, if the local agency has one. The notice shall be delivered personally or by any other means and shall be received at least 24 hours before the time of the meeting as specified in the notice. The call and notice shall specify the time and place of the special meeting and the business to be transacted or discussed. No other business shall be considered at these meetings by the legislative body. The written notice may be dispensed with as to any member who at or prior to the time the meeting convenes files with the clerk or secretary of the legislative body a written waiver of notice. The waiver may be given by telegram. The written notice may also be dispensed with as to any member who is actually present at the meeting at the time it convenes.

The call and notice shall be posted at least 24 hours prior to the special meeting in a location that is freely accessible to members of the public.

(b) Notwithstanding any other law, a legislative body shall not call a special meeting regarding the salaries, salary schedules or compensation paid in the form of fringe benefits of a local agency executive, as defined in subdivision (d) of Section 3511.1.

However, this subdivision does not apply to a local agency calling a special meeting to discuss the local agency's budget.

(c) For purposes of subdivision (a), the requirement that the agenda be posted on the local agency's Internet Web site, if the local agency has one, shall only apply to a legislative body that meets either of the following standards:

(1) A legislative body as that term is defined by subdivision (a) of Section 54952.

(2) A legislative body as that term is defined by subdivision (b) of Section 54952, if the members of the legislative body are compensated for their appearance, and if one or more of the members of the legislative body are also members of a legislative body as that term is defined by subdivision (a) of Section 54952.

Section 54956.5. Emergency meetings; Notice

(a) For purposes of this section, "emergency situation" means both of the following:

(1) An emergency, which shall be defined as a work stoppage, crippling activity or other activity that severely impairs public health, safety or both, as determined by a majority of the members of the legislative body.

(2) A dire emergency, which shall be defined as a crippling disaster, mass destruction, terrorist act or threatened terrorist activity that poses peril so immediate and significant that requiring a legislative body to provide one-hour notice before holding an emergency meeting under this section may endanger the public health, safety or both, as determined by a majority of the members of the legislative body.

(b) (1) Subject to paragraph (2), in the case of an emergency situation involving matters upon which prompt action is necessary due to the disruption or threatened disruption of public facilities, a legislative body may hold an emergency meeting without complying with either the 24-hour notice requirement or the 24-hour posting requirement of Section 54956, or both, of the notice and posting requirements.

(2) Each local newspaper of general circulation and radio or television station that has requested notice of special meetings pursuant to Section 54956 shall be notified by the presiding officer of the legislative body or designee thereof, one hour prior to the emergency meeting, or, in the case of a dire emergency, at or near the time that the presiding officer or designee notifies the members of the legislative body of the emergency meeting. This notice shall be given by telephone and all telephone numbers provided in the most recent request of a newspaper or station for notification of special meetings shall be exhausted. In the event that telephone services are not functioning, the notice requirements of this section shall be deemed waived and the legislative body or designee of the legislative body, shall notify those newspapers, radio stations or television stations of the fact of the holding of the emergency meeting, the purpose of the meeting and any action taken at the meeting as soon after the meeting as possible.

(c) During a meeting held pursuant to this section, the legislative body may meet in closed session pursuant to Section 54957 if agreed to by a two-thirds vote of the members of the legislative body present, or, if less than two-thirds of the members are present, by a unanimous vote of the members present.

(d) All special meeting requirements as prescribed in Section 54956, shall be applicable to a meeting called pursuant to this section, with the exception of the 24-hour notice requirement.

(e) The minutes of a meeting called pursuant to this section, a list of person(s) who is the presiding officer of the legislative body or designee of the legislative body, notified or attempted to notify, a copy of the rollcall vote and any actions taken at the meeting shall be posted for a minimum of 10 days in a public place as soon after the meeting as possible.

Section 54956.6. Fees

No fees may be charged by the legislative body of a local agency for carrying out any provision of this chapter, except as specifically authorized by this chapter.

Section 54956.7. Closed sessions regarding application from person with criminal record

Whenever a legislative body of a local agency determines that it is necessary to discuss and determine whether an applicant for a license or license renewal, who has a criminal record is sufficiently rehabilitated to obtain the license, the legislative body may hold a closed session with the applicant and the applicant's attorney, if any, for the purpose of holding the discussion and making the determination. If the legislative body determines, as a result of the closed session, that the issuance or renewal of the license should be denied, the applicant shall be offered the opportunity to withdraw the application. If the applicant withdraws the application, no record shall be kept of the discussions or decisions made at the closed session and all matters relating to the closed session shall be confidential. If the applicant does not withdraw the application, the legislative body shall take action at the public meeting during which the closed session is held or at its next public meeting denying the application for the license, but all matters relating to the closed session are confidential and shall not be disclosed without the consent of the applicant, except in an action by an applicant who has been denied a license challenging the denial of the license.

Section 54956.75. Closed session for response to final draft audit report

(a) Nothing contained in this chapter shall be construed to prevent the legislative body of a local agency that has received a confidential final draft audit report from the Bureau of State Audits from holding closed sessions to discuss its response to that report.

(b) After the public release of an audit report by the Bureau of State Audits, if a legislative body of a local agency meets to discuss the audit report, it shall do so in an open session unless exempted from that requirement by some other provision of law.

Section 54956.8. Closed sessions regarding real property negotiations

Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, a legislative body of a local agency may hold a closed session with its negotiator prior to the purchase, sale, exchange or lease of real property by or for the local agency to grant authority to its negotiator regarding the price and terms of payment for the purchase, sale, exchange or lease.

However, prior to the closed session, the legislative body of the local agency shall hold an open and public session in which it identifies its negotiators, the real property or real properties which the negotiations may concern and the person or persons with whom its negotiators may negotiate.

For purposes of this section, negotiators may be members of the legislative body of the local agency.

For purposes of this section, "lease" includes renewal or renegotiation of a lease.

Nothing in this section shall preclude a local agency from holding a closed session for discussions regarding eminent domain proceedings pursuant to Section 54956.9.

Section 54956.81. Closed sessions regarding purchase or sale of pension fund investments

Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, a legislative body of a local agency that invests pension funds may hold a closed session to consider the purchase or sale of particular specific pension fund investments. All investment transaction decisions made during the closed session shall be made by rollcall vote entered into the minutes of the closed session as provided in subdivision (a) of Section 54957.2.

Section 54956.86. Closed session for health plan member

Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, a legislative body of a local agency which provides services pursuant to Section 14087.3 of the Welfare and Institutions Code may hold a closed session to hear a charge or complaint from a member enrolled in its health plan if the member does not wish to have his or her name, medical status or other information that is protected by federal law publicly disclosed. Prior to holding a closed session pursuant to this section, the legislative body shall inform the member, in writing, of his or her right to have the charge or complaint heard in an open session rather than a closed session.

Section 54956.87. Disclosure of records and information; Meetings in closed session

(a) Notwithstanding any other provision of this chapter, the records of a health plan that is licensed pursuant to the Knox-Keene Health Care Service Plan Act of 1975 (Chapter 2.2 (commencing with Section 1340) of Division 2 of the Health and Safety Code) and that is governed by a county board of supervisors, whether paper records, records maintained in the management information system or records in any other form, that relate to provider rate or payment determinations, allocation or distribution

methodologies for provider payments, formulas or calculations for these payments and contract negotiations with providers of health care for alternative rates are exempt from disclosure for a period of three years after the contract is fully executed. The transmission of the records, or the information contained therein in an alternative form to the board of supervisors shall not constitute a waiver of exemption from disclosure and the records and information once transmitted to the board of supervisors shall be subject to this same exemption.

(b) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the governing board of a health plan that is licensed pursuant to the Knox-Keene Health Care Service Plan Act of 1975 (Chapter 2.2 (commencing with Section 1340) of Division 2 of the Health and Safety Code) and that is governed by a county board of supervisors may order that a meeting held solely for the purpose of discussion or taking action on health plan trade secrets, as defined in subdivision (f), shall be held in closed session. The requirements of making a public report of action taken in closed session and the vote or abstention of every member present, may be limited to a brief general description without the information constituting the trade secret.

(c) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the governing board of a health plan may meet in closed session to consider and take action on matters pertaining to contracts and contract negotiations by the health plan with providers of health care services concerning all matters related to rates of payment. The governing board may delete the portion or portions containing trade secrets from any documents that were finally approved in the closed session held pursuant to subdivision (b) that are provided to persons who have made the timely or standing request.

(d) Nothing in this section shall be construed as preventing the governing board from meeting in closed session as otherwise provided by law.

(e) The provisions of this section shall not prevent access to any records by the Joint Legislative Audit Committee in the exercise of its powers pursuant to Article 1 (commencing with Section 10500) of Chapter 4 of Part 2 of Division 2 of Title 2. The provisions of this section also shall not prevent access to any records by the Department of Managed Health Care in the exercise of its powers pursuant to Article 1 (commencing with Section 1340) of Chapter 2.2 of Division 2 of the Health and Safety Code.

(f) For purposes of this section, "health plan trade secret" means a trade secret, as defined in subdivision (d) of Section 3426.1 of the Civil Code, that also meets both of the following criteria:

(1) The secrecy of the information is necessary for the health plan to initiate a new service, program, marketing strategy, business plan or technology, or to add a benefit or product.

(2) Premature disclosure of the trade secret would create a substantial probability of depriving the health plan of a substantial economic benefit or opportunity.

Section 54956.9. Closed sessions concerning pending litigation; Lawyer-client privilege

(a) Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to prevent a legislative body of a local agency, based on advice of its legal counsel, from holding a closed session to confer with, or receive advice from, its legal counsel regarding pending litigation when discussion in open session concerning those matters would prejudice the position of the local agency in the litigation.

(b) For purposes of this chapter, all expressions of the lawyer-client privilege other than those provided in this section are hereby abrogated. This section is the exclusive expression of the lawyer-client privilege for purposes of conducting closed-session meetings pursuant to this chapter.

(c) For purposes of this section, "litigation" includes any adjudicatory proceeding, including eminent domain, before a court or administrative body exercising its adjudicatory authority, hearing officer or arbitrator.

(d) For purposes of this section, litigation shall be considered pending when any of the following circumstances exist:

(1) Litigation, to which the local agency is a party, has been initiated formally.

(2) A point has been reached where, in the opinion of the legislative body of the local agency on the advice of its legal counsel based on existing facts and circumstances, there is a significant exposure to litigation against the local agency.

(3) Based on existing facts and circumstances, the legislative body of the local agency is meeting only to decide whether a closed session is authorized pursuant to paragraph (2).

(4) Based on existing facts and circumstances, the legislative body of the local agency has decided to initiate or is deciding whether to initiate litigation.

(e) For purposes of paragraphs (2) and (3) of subdivision (d), "existing facts and circumstances" shall consist only of one of the following:

(1) Facts and circumstances that might result in litigation against the local agency but which the local agency believes are not yet known to a potential plaintiff or plaintiffs, which facts and circumstances need not be disclosed.

(2) Facts and circumstances, including, but not limited to, an accident, disaster, incident or transactional occurrence that might result in litigation against the agency and that are known to a potential plaintiff or plaintiffs, which facts or circumstances shall be publicly stated on the agenda or announced.

(3) The receipt of a claim pursuant to the Government Claims Act (Division 3.6 (commencing with Section 810) of Title 1 of the Government Code) or some other written

communication from a potential plaintiff threatening litigation, which claim or communication shall be available for public inspection pursuant to Section 54957.5.

(4) A statement made by a person in an open and public meeting threatening litigation on a specific matter within the responsibility of the legislative body.

(5) A statement threatening litigation made by a person outside an open and public meeting on a specific matter within the responsibility of the legislative body, so long as the official or employee of the local agency receiving knowledge of the threat makes a contemporaneous or other record of the statement prior to the meeting, which record shall be available for public inspection pursuant to Section 54957.5. The records so created need not identify the alleged victim of unlawful or tortious sexual conduct or anyone making the threat on their behalf, or identify a public employee who is the alleged perpetrator of any unlawful or tortious conduct upon which a threat of litigation is based, unless the identity of the person has been publicly disclosed.

(f) Nothing in this section shall require disclosure of written communications that are privileged and not subject to disclosure pursuant to the California Public Records Act (Division 10 (commencing with Section 7920.000) of Title 1).

(g) Prior to holding a closed session pursuant to this section, the legislative body of the local agency shall state on the agenda or publicly announce the paragraph of subdivision (d) that authorizes the closed session. If the session is closed pursuant to paragraph (1) of subdivision (d), the body shall state the title of or otherwise specifically identify the litigation to be discussed, unless the body states that to do so would jeopardize the agency's ability to effectuate service of process upon one or more unserved parties, or that to do so would jeopardize its ability to conclude existing settlement negotiations to its advantage.

(h) A local agency shall be considered to be a "party" or to have a "significant exposure to litigation" if an officer or employee of the local agency is a party or has significant exposure to litigation concerning prior or prospective activities or alleged activities during the course and scope of that office or employment, including litigation in which it is an issue whether an activity is outside the course and scope of the office or employment.

Section 54956.95. Closed sessions regarding liability

(a) Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to prevent a joint powers agency formed pursuant to Article 1 (commencing with Section 6500) of Chapter 5 of Division 7 of Title 1 for purposes of insurance pooling, or a local agency member of the joint powers agency from holding a closed session to discuss a claim for the payment of tort liability losses, public liability losses or workers' compensation liability incurred by the joint powers agency or a local agency member of the joint powers agency.

(b) Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to prevent the Local Agency Self-Insurance Authority formed pursuant to Chapter 5.5 (commencing with Section 6599.01) of Division 7 of Title 1, or a local agency member of the authority, from holding a closed

session to discuss a claim for the payment of tort liability losses, public liability losses or workers' compensation liability incurred by the authority or a local agency member of the authority.

(c) Nothing in this section shall be construed to affect Section 54956.9 with respect to any other local agency.

Section 54956.96. Disclosure of specified information in closed session of joint powers agency, Clean Power Alliance of Southern California; Authorization of designated alternate to attend closed session; Closed session of legislative body of local agency member

(a) Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to prevent the legislative body of a joint powers agency formed pursuant to Article 1 (commencing with Section 6500) of Chapter 5 of Division 7 of Title 1, from adopting a policy or a bylaw, or including in its joint powers agreement provisions that authorize either or both of the following:

(1) All information received by the legislative body of the local agency member in a closed session related to the information presented to the joint powers agency in closed session shall be confidential. However, a member of the legislative body of a local agency member may disclose information obtained in a closed session that has direct financial or liability implications for that local agency to the following individuals:

(A) Legal counsel of that local agency member for purposes of obtaining advice on whether the matter has direct financial or liability implications for that local agency member.

(B) Other members of the legislative body of the local agency present in a closed session of that local agency member.

(2) Any designated alternate member of the legislative body of the joint powers agency who is also a member of the legislative body of a local agency member and who is attending a properly noticed meeting of the joint powers agency in lieu of a local agency member's regularly appointed member to attend closed sessions of the joint powers agency.

(b) (1) In addition to the authority described in subdivision (a), the Clean Power Alliance of Southern California or its successor entity, may adopt a policy or a bylaw or include in its joint powers agreement a provision that authorizes both of the following:

(A) A designated alternate member of the legislative body of the Clean Power Alliance of Southern California or its successor entity, who is not a member of the legislative body of a local agency member and who is attending a properly noticed meeting of the Clean Power Alliance of Southern California or its successor entity, in lieu of a local agency member's regularly appointed member to attend closed sessions of the Clean Power Alliance of Southern California or its successor entity.

(B) All information that is received by a designated alternate member of the legislative body of the Clean Power Alliance of Southern California or its successor entity, who is not a member of the legislative body of a local agency member and that is presented to the Clean Power Alliance of Southern California or its successor entity, in closed session, shall be confidential. However, the designated alternate member may disclose information obtained in a closed session that has direct financial or liability implications for the local agency member for which the designated alternate member attended the closed session, to the following individuals:

(i) Legal counsel of that local agency member for purposes of obtaining advice on whether the matter has direct financial or liability implications for that local agency member.

(ii) Members of the legislative body of the local agency present in a closed session of that local agency member.

(2) If the Clean Power Alliance of Southern California or its successor entity, adopts a policy or bylaw or includes in its joint powers agreement a provision authorized pursuant to paragraph (1), the Clean Power Alliance of Southern California or its successor entity, shall establish policies to prevent conflicts of interest and to address breaches of confidentiality that apply to a designated alternate member who is not a member of the legislative body of a local agency member who attends a closed session of the Clean Power Alliance of Southern California or its successor entity.

(c) If the legislative body of a joint powers agency adopts a policy or a bylaw or includes provisions in its joint powers agreement pursuant to subdivision (a) or (b), then the legislative body of the local agency member, upon the advice of its legal counsel, may conduct a closed session in order to receive, discuss and take action concerning information obtained in a closed session of the joint powers agency pursuant to paragraph (1) of subdivision (a) or paragraph (1) of subdivision (b).

(d) This section shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2025 and as of that date is repealed.

Section 54956.97. Public bank; governing board or committee of governing board; closed session

Notwithstanding any provision of law, the governing board or a committee of the governing board of a public bank, as defined in Section 57600 of the Government Code, may meet in closed session to consider and take action on matters pertaining to all of the following:

(a) A loan or investment decision.

(b) A decision of the internal audit committee, the compliance committee or the governance committee.

(c) A meeting with a state or federal regulator.

Section 54956.98. Public bank; policy or bylaw; information from a closed session considered confidential

(a) For purposes of this section, the following definitions shall apply:

(1) "Shareholder, member, or owner local agency" or "shareholder, member, or owner" means a local agency that is a shareholder of a public bank.

(2) "Public bank" has the same meaning as defined in Section 57600.

(b) The governing board of a public bank may adopt a policy or a bylaw or include in its governing documents provisions that authorize any of the following:

(1) All information received by a shareholder, member or owner of the public bank in a closed session related to the information presented to the governing board of a public bank in closed session shall be confidential. However, a member of the governing board of a shareholder, member or owner local agency may disclose information obtained in a closed session that has direct financial or liability implications for that local agency to the following individuals:

(A) Legal counsel of that shareholder, member or owner local agency for purposes of obtaining advice on whether the matter has direct financial or liability implications for that shareholder local agency.

(B) Other members of the governing board of the local agency present in a closed session of that shareholder, member or owner local agency.

(2) A designated alternate member of the governing board of the public bank who is also a member of the governing board of a shareholder, member or owner of the local agency and who is attending a properly noticed meeting of the public bank governing board in lieu of a shareholder, member or owner of the local agency's regularly appointed member may attend a closed session of the public bank governing board.

(c) If the governing board of a public bank adopts a policy or a bylaw or includes provisions in its governing documents pursuant to subdivision (b), then the governing board of the shareholder, member or owner of the local agency, upon the advice of its legal counsel, may conduct a closed session in order to receive, discuss and take action concerning information obtained in a closed session of the public bank governing board pursuant to paragraph (1) of subdivision (b).

Section 54957. Closed session regarding public security, facilities, employees, examination of witness

(a) This chapter shall not be construed to prevent the legislative body of a local agency from holding closed sessions with the Governor, Attorney General, district attorney, agency counsel, sheriff or chief of police, or their respective deputies or a security consultant or a security operations manager, on matters posing a threat to the

security of public buildings, a threat to the security of essential public services, including water, drinking water, wastewater treatment, natural gas service and electric service, or a threat to the public's right of access to public services or public facilities.

(b) (1) Subject to paragraph (2), this chapter shall not be construed to prevent the legislative body of a local agency from holding closed sessions during a regular or special meeting to consider the appointment, employment, evaluation of performance, discipline or dismissal of a public employee or to hear complaints or charges brought against the employee by another person or employee unless the employee requests a public session.

(2) As a condition to holding a closed session on specific complaints or charges brought against an employee by another person or employee, the employee shall be given written notice of his or her right to have the complaints or charges heard in an open session rather than a closed session, which notice shall be delivered to the employee personally or by mail at least 24 hours before the time for holding the session. If notice is not given, any disciplinary or other action taken by the legislative body against the employee based on the specific complaints or charges in the closed session shall be null and void.

(3) The legislative body also may exclude from the public or closed meeting during the examination of a witness, any or all other witnesses in the matter being investigated by the legislative body.

(4) For the purposes of this subdivision, the term "employee" shall include an officer or an independent contractor who functions as an officer or an employee but shall not include any elected official, member of a legislative body or other independent contractors. This subdivision shall not limit local officials' ability to hold closed session meetings pursuant to Sections 1461, 32106 and 32155 of the Health and Safety Code or Sections 37606 and 37624.3 of the Government Code. Closed sessions held pursuant to this subdivision shall not include discussion or action on proposed compensation except for a reduction of compensation that results from the imposition of discipline.

Section 54957.1. Public report of action taken in closed session; Form; Availability; Actions for injury to interests

(a) The legislative body of any local agency shall publicly report any action taken in closed session and the vote or abstention on that action of every member present, as follows:

(1) Approval of an agreement concluding real estate negotiations pursuant to Section 54956.8 shall be reported after the agreement is final, as follows:

(A) If its own approval renders the agreement final, the body shall report that approval and the substance of the agreement in open session at the public meeting during which the closed session is held.

(B) If final approval rests with the other party to the negotiations, the local agency shall disclose the fact of that approval and the substance of the agreement upon inquiry by any person as soon as the other party or its agent has informed the local agency of its approval.

(2) Approval given to its legal counsel to defend, or seek or refrain from seeking appellate review or relief, or to enter as an amicus curiae in any form of litigation as the result of a consultation under Section 54956.9 shall be reported in open session at the public meeting during which the closed session is held. The report shall identify, if known, the adverse party or parties and the substance of the litigation. In the case of approval given to initiate or intervene in an action, the announcement need not identify the action, the defendants or other particulars, but shall specify that the direction to initiate or intervene in an action has been given and that the action, the defendants and the other particulars shall, once formally commenced, be disclosed to any person upon inquiry, unless to do so would jeopardize the agency's ability to effectuate service of process on one or more unserved parties, or that to do so would jeopardize its ability to conclude existing settlement negotiations to its advantage.

(3) Approval given to its legal counsel of a settlement of pending litigation, as defined in Section 54956.9, at any stage prior to or during a judicial or quasi-judicial proceeding shall be reported after the settlement is final, as follows:

(A) If the legislative body accepts a settlement offer signed by the opposing party, the body shall report its acceptance and identify the substance of the agreement in open session at the public meeting during which the closed session is held.

(B) If final approval rests with some other party to the litigation or with the court, then as soon as the settlement becomes final and upon inquiry by any person, the local agency shall disclose the fact of that approval and identify the substance of the agreement.

(4) Disposition reached as to claims discussed in closed session pursuant to Section 54956.95 shall be reported as soon as reached in a manner that identifies the name of the claimant, the name of the local agency claimed against, the substance of the claim and any monetary amount approved for payment and agreed upon by the claimant.

(5) Action taken to appoint, employ, dismiss, accept the resignation of or otherwise affect the employment status of a public employee in closed session pursuant to Section 54957 shall be reported at the public meeting during which the closed session is held. Any report required by this paragraph shall identify the title of the position. The general requirement of this paragraph notwithstanding, the report of a dismissal or of the nonrenewal of an employment contract shall be deferred until the first public meeting following the exhaustion of administrative remedies, if any.

(6) Approval of an agreement concluding labor negotiations with represented employees pursuant to Section 54957.6 shall be reported after the agreement is final and

has been accepted or ratified by the other party. The report shall identify the item approved and the other party or parties to the negotiation.

(7) Pension fund investment transaction decisions made pursuant to Section 54956.81 shall be disclosed at the first open meeting of the legislative body held after the earlier of the close of the investment transaction or the transfer of pension fund assets for the investment transaction.

(b) Reports that are required to be made pursuant to this section may be made orally or in writing. The legislative body shall provide to any person who has submitted a written request to the legislative body within 24 hours of the posting of the agenda, or to any person who has made a standing request for all documentation as part of a request for notice of meetings pursuant to Section 54954.1 or 54956, if the requester is present at the time the closed session ends, copies of any contracts, settlement agreements or other documents that were finally approved or adopted in the closed session. If the action taken results in one or more substantive amendments to the related documents requiring retyping, the documents need not be released until the retyping is completed during normal business hours, provided that the presiding officer of the legislative body or his or her designee orally summarizes the substance of the amendments for the benefit of the document requester or any other person present and requesting the information.

(c) The documentation referred to in subdivision (b) shall be available to any person on the next business day following the meeting in which the action referred to is taken or, in the case of substantial amendments, when any necessary retyping is complete.

(d) Nothing in this section shall be construed to require that the legislative body approve actions not otherwise subject to legislative body approval.

(e) No action for injury to a reputational, liberty or other personal interest may be commenced by or on behalf of any employee or former employee with respect to whom a disclosure is made by a legislative body in an effort to comply with this section.

(f) This section is necessary to implement, and reasonably within the scope of, paragraph (1) of subdivision (b) of Section 3 of Article I of the California Constitution.

Section 54957.2. Minute book for closed sessions

(a) The legislative body of a local agency may, by ordinance or resolution, designate a clerk or other officer or employee of the local agency who shall then attend each closed session of the legislative body and keep and enter in a minute book a record of topics discussed and decisions made at the meeting. The minute book made pursuant to this section is not a public record subject to inspection pursuant to the California Public Records Act (Division 10 (commencing with Section 7920.000) of Title 1), and shall be kept confidential. The minute book shall be available only to members of the legislative body or, if a violation of this chapter is alleged to have occurred at a closed session, to a court of general jurisdiction wherein the local agency lies. Such minute book may, but need not, consist of a recording of the closed session.

(b) An elected legislative body of a local agency may require that each legislative body all or a majority of whose members are appointed by or under the authority of the elected legislative body keep a minute book as prescribed under subdivision (a).

Section 54957.5. Agendas and other writings as public records

(a) Agendas of public meetings are disclosable public records under the California Public Records Act (Division 10 (commencing with Section 7920.000) of Title 1), and shall be made available upon request without delay and in compliance with Section 54954.2 or Section 54956, as applicable. However, this section shall not apply to a writing, or portion thereof, that is exempt from public disclosure.

(b) (1) If a writing is a public record related to an agenda item for an open session of a regular meeting of the legislative body of a local agency and is distributed to all, or a majority of all, of the members of a legislative body of a local agency by a person in connection with a matter subject to a discussion or consideration at an open meeting of the body less than 72 hours before that meeting, the writing shall be made available for public inspection pursuant to paragraph (2) at the time the writing is distributed to all, or a majority of all, of the members of the body.

(2) (A) Except as provided in subparagraph (B), a local agency shall comply with both of the following requirements:

(i) A local agency shall make any writing described in paragraph (1) available for public inspection at a public office or location that the agency shall designate for this purpose.

(ii) A local agency shall list the address of the office or location designated pursuant to clause (i) on the agendas for all meetings of the legislative body of that agency.

(B) A local agency shall not be required to comply with the requirements of subparagraph (A) if all of the following requirements are met:

(i) An initial staff report or similar document containing an executive summary and the staff recommendation, if any, relating to that agenda item is made available for public inspection at the office or location designated pursuant to clause (i) of subparagraph (A) at least 72 hours before the meeting.

(ii) The local agency immediately posts any writing described in paragraph (1) on the local agency's Internet Website in a position and manner that makes it clear that the writing relates to an agenda item for an upcoming meeting.

(iii) The local agency lists the web address of the local agency's internet website on the agendas for all meetings of the legislative body of that agency.

(iv) (I) Subject to subclause (II), the local agency makes physical copies available for public inspection, beginning the next regular business hours

for the local agency, at the office or location designated pursuant to clause (i) of subparagraph (A).

(II) This clause is satisfied only if the next regular business hours of the local agency commence at least 24 hours before that meeting.

(c) Writings that are public records described in subdivision (b) and distributed during a public meeting shall be made available for public inspection at the meeting if prepared by the local agency or a member of its legislative body, or after the meeting if prepared by some other person. These writings shall be made available in appropriate alternative formats upon request by a person with a disability, as required by Section 202 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. Sec. 12132) and the federal rules and regulations adopted in implementation thereof.

(d) This chapter shall not be construed to prevent the legislative body of a local agency from charging a fee or deposit for a copy of a public record pursuant to Section 7922.530, except that a surcharge shall not be imposed on persons with disabilities in violation of Section 202 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. Sec. 12132) and the federal rules and regulations adopted in implementation thereof.

(e) This section shall not be construed to limit or delay the public's right to inspect or obtain a copy of any record required to be disclosed under the requirements of the California Public Records Act (Division 10 (commencing with Section 7920.000) of Title 1), including, but not limited to, the ability of the public to inspect public records pursuant to Section 7922.525 and obtain copies of public records pursuant to either subdivision (b) of Section 7922.53 or Section 7922.535. This chapter shall not be construed to require a legislative body of a local agency to place any paid advertisement or any other paid notice in any publication.

Section 54957.6. Closed sessions regarding employee matters

(a) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, a legislative body of a local agency may hold closed sessions with the local agency's designated representatives regarding the salaries, salary schedules or compensation paid in the form of fringe benefits of its represented and unrepresented employees, and, for represented employees, any other matter within the statutorily provided scope of representation.

However, prior to the closed session, the legislative body of the local agency shall hold an open and public session in which it identifies its designated representatives.

Closed sessions of a legislative body of a local agency, as permitted in this section, shall be for the purpose of reviewing its position and instructing the local agency's designated representatives.

Closed sessions, as permitted in this section, may take place prior to and during consultations and discussions with representatives of employee organizations and unrepresented employees.

Closed sessions with the local agency's designated representative regarding the salaries, salary schedules or compensation paid in the form of fringe benefits may include discussion of an agency's available funds and funding priorities, but only insofar as these discussions relate to providing instructions to the local agency's designated representative.

Closed sessions held pursuant to this section shall not include final action on the proposed compensation of one or more unrepresented employees.

For the purposes enumerated in this section, a legislative body of a local agency may also meet with a state conciliator who has intervened in the proceedings.

(b) For the purposes of this section, the term "employee" shall include an officer or an independent contractor who functions as an officer or an employee, but shall not include any elected official, member of a legislative body or other independent contractors.

Section 54957.7. Disclosure of items to be discussed at closed session

(a) Prior to holding any closed session, the legislative body of the local agency shall disclose in an open meeting, the item or items to be discussed in the closed session. The disclosure may take the form of a reference to the item or items as they are listed by number or letter on the agenda. In the closed session, the legislative body may consider only those matters covered in its statement. Nothing in this section shall require or authorize a disclosure of information prohibited by state or federal law.

(b) After any closed session, the legislative body shall reconvene into open session prior to adjournment and shall make any disclosures required by Section 54957.1 of action taken in the closed session.

(c) The announcements required to be made in open session pursuant to this section may be made at the location announced in the agenda for the closed session, as long as the public is allowed to be present at that location for the purpose of hearing the announcements.

Section 54957.8. Closed sessions of multijurisdictional drug law enforcement agencies

(a) For purposes of this section, "multijurisdictional law enforcement agency" means a joint powers entity formed pursuant to Article 1 (commencing with Section 6500) of Chapter 5 of Division 7 of Title 1 that provides law enforcement services for the parties to the joint powers agreement for the purpose of investigating criminal activity involving drugs; gangs; sex crimes; firearms trafficking or felony possession of a firearm; high technology, computer or identity theft; human trafficking; or vehicle theft.

(b) Nothing contained in this chapter shall be construed to prevent the legislative body of a multijurisdictional law enforcement agency, or an advisory body of a multijurisdictional law enforcement agency, from holding closed sessions to discuss the

case records of any ongoing criminal investigation of the multijurisdictional law enforcement agency or of any party to the joint powers agreement, to hear testimony from persons involved in the investigation and to discuss courses of action in particular cases.

Section 54957.9. Authorization to clear room where meeting willfully interrupted; Readmission

In the event that any meeting is willfully interrupted by a group or groups of persons so as to render the orderly conduct of such meeting unfeasible and order cannot be restored by the removal of individuals who are willfully interrupting the meeting, the members of the legislative body conducting the meeting may order the meeting room cleared and continue in session. Only matters appearing on the agenda may be considered in such a session. Representatives of the press or other news media, except those participating in the disturbance, shall be allowed to attend any session held pursuant to this section. Nothing in this section shall prohibit the legislative body from establishing a procedure for readmitting an individual or individuals not responsible for willfully disturbing the orderly conduct of the meeting.

Section 54957.95 Removal of Disruptive Individuals

(a) (1) In addition to authority exercised pursuant to Sections 54954.3 and 54957.9, the presiding member of the legislative body conducting a meeting or their designee may remove, or cause the removal of, an individual for disrupting the meeting.

(2) Prior to removing an individual, the presiding member or their designee shall warn the individual that their behavior is disrupting the meeting and that their failure to cease their behavior may result in their removal. The presiding member or their designee may then remove the individual if they do not promptly cease their disruptive behavior. This paragraph does not apply to any behavior described in subparagraph (B) of paragraph (1) of subdivision (b).

(b) As used in this section:

(1) "Disrupting" means engaging in behavior during a meeting of a legislative body that actually disrupts, disturbs, impedes, or renders infeasible the orderly conduct of the meeting and includes, but is not limited to, one of the following:

(A) A failure to comply with reasonable and lawful regulations adopted by a legislative body pursuant to Section 54954.3 or any other law.

(B) Engaging in behavior that constitutes use of force or a true threat of force.

(2) "True threat of force" means a threat that has sufficient indicia of intent and seriousness, that a reasonable observer would perceive it to be an actual threat to use force by the person making the threat.

Section 54957.10. Closed sessions regarding application for early withdrawal of deferred compensation plan funds

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, a legislative body of a local agency may hold closed sessions to discuss a local agency employee's application for early withdrawal of funds in a deferred compensation plan when the application is based on financial hardship arising from an unforeseeable emergency due to illness, accident, casualty or other extraordinary event, as specified in the deferred compensation plan.

Section 54958. Application of chapter

The provisions of this chapter shall apply to the legislative body of every local agency notwithstanding the conflicting provisions of any other state law.

Section 54959. Criminal penalty for violation of chapter

Each member of a legislative body who attends a meeting of that legislative body where action is taken in violation of any provision of this chapter, and where the member intends to deprive the public of information to which the member knows, or has reason to know, the public is entitled under this chapter, is guilty of a misdemeanor.

Section 54960. Proceeding to prevent violation of chapter; Recording closed sessions; Procedure for discovery of tapes

(a) The district attorney or any interested person may commence an action by mandamus, injunction, or declaratory relief for the purpose of stopping or preventing violations or threatened violations of this chapter by members of the legislative body of a local agency or to determine the applicability of this chapter to ongoing actions or threatened future actions of the legislative body, or to determine the applicability of this chapter to past actions of the legislative body, subject to Section 54960.2, or to determine whether any rule or action by the legislative body to penalize or otherwise discourage the expression of one or more of its members is valid or invalid under the laws of this state or of the United States, or to compel the legislative body to audio record its closed sessions as hereinafter provided.

(b) The court in its discretion may, upon a judgment of a violation of Section 54956.7, 54956.8, 54956.9, 54956.95, 54957 or 54957.6, order the legislative body to audio record its closed sessions and preserve the audio recordings for the period and under the terms of security and confidentiality the court deems appropriate.

(c) (1) Each recording so kept shall be immediately labeled with the date of the closed session recorded and the title of the clerk or other officer who shall be custodian of the recording.

(2) The audio recordings shall be subject to the following discovery procedures:

(A) In any case in which discovery or disclosure of the audio recording is sought by either the district attorney or the plaintiff in a civil action pursuant to Section 54959, 54960 or 54960.1 alleging that a violation of this chapter has occurred in a closed session that has been recorded pursuant to this section, the party seeking discovery or disclosure shall file a written notice of motion with the appropriate court with notice to the governmental agency that has custody and control of the audio recording. The notice shall be given pursuant to subdivision (b) of Section 1005 of the Code of Civil Procedure.

(B) The notice shall include, in addition to the items required by Section 1010 of the Code of Civil Procedure, all of the following:

(i) Identification of the proceeding in which discovery or disclosure is sought, the party seeking discovery or disclosure, the date and time of the meeting recorded and the governmental agency that has custody and control of the recording.

(ii) An affidavit that contains specific facts indicating that a violation of the act occurred in the closed session.

(3) If the court, following a review of the motion, finds that there is good cause to believe that a violation has occurred, the court may review, in camera, the recording of that portion of the closed session alleged to have violated the act.

(4) If, following the in camera review, the court concludes that disclosure of a portion of the recording would be likely to materially assist in the resolution of the litigation alleging violation of this chapter, the court shall, in its discretion, make a certified transcript of the portion of the recording a public exhibit in the proceeding.

(5) This section shall not permit discovery of communications that are protected by the attorney-client privilege.

Section 54960.1. Proceeding to determine validity of action; Demand for correction

(a) The district attorney or any interested person may commence an action by mandamus or injunction for the purpose of obtaining a judicial determination that an action taken by a legislative body of a local agency in violation of Section 54953, 54954.2, 54954.5, 54954.6, 54956 or 54956.5 is null and void under this section. Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to prevent a legislative body from curing or correcting an action challenged pursuant to this section.

(b) Prior to any action being commenced pursuant to subdivision (a), the district attorney or interested person shall make a demand of the legislative body to cure or correct the action alleged to have been taken in violation of Section 54953, 54954.2, 54954.5, 54954.6, 54956 or 54956.5. The demand shall be in writing and clearly describe the challenged action of the legislative body and nature of the alleged violation.

(c) (1) The written demand shall be made within 90 days from the date the action was taken unless the action was taken in an open session but in violation of Section 54954.2, in which case the written demand shall be made within 30 days from the date the action was taken.

(2) Within 30 days of receipt of the demand, the legislative body shall cure or correct the challenged action and inform the demanding party in writing of its actions to cure or correct or inform the demanding party in writing of its decision not to cure or correct the challenged action.

(3) If the legislative body takes no action within the 30-day period, the inaction shall be deemed a decision not to cure or correct the challenged action, and the 15-day period to commence the action described in subdivision (a) shall commence to run the day after the 30-day period to cure or correct expires.

(4) Within 15 days of receipt of the written notice of the legislative body's decision to cure or correct, or not to cure or correct, or within 15 days of the expiration of the 30-day period to cure or correct, whichever is earlier, the demanding party shall be required to commence the action pursuant to subdivision (a) or thereafter be barred from commencing the action.

(d) An action taken that is alleged to have been taken in violation of Section 54953, 54954.2, 54954.5, 54954.6, 54956 or 54956.5 shall not be determined to be null and void if any of the following conditions exist:

(1) The action taken was in substantial compliance with Sections 54953, 54954.2, 54954.5, 54954.6, 54956 and 54956.5.

(2) The action taken was in connection with the sale or issuance of notes, bonds, or other evidences of indebtedness or any contract, instrument or agreement thereto.

(3) The action taken gave rise to a contractual obligation, including a contract let by competitive bid other than compensation for services in the form of salary or fees for professional services, upon which a party has, in good faith and without notice of a challenge to the validity of the action, detrimentally relied.

(4) The action taken was in connection with the collection of any tax.

(5) Any person, city, city and county, county, district or any agency or subdivision of the state alleging noncompliance with subdivision (a) of Section 54954.2, Section 54956 or Section 54956.5, because of any defect, error, irregularity or omission in the notice given pursuant to those provisions, had actual notice of the item of business at least 72 hours prior to the meeting at which the action was taken, if the meeting was noticed pursuant to Section 54954.2, or 24 hours prior to the meeting at which the action was taken if the meeting was noticed pursuant to Section 54956, or prior to the meeting at which the action was taken if the meeting is held pursuant to Section 54956.5.

(e) During any action seeking a judicial determination pursuant to subdivision (a) if the court determines, pursuant to a showing by the legislative body that an action alleged to have been taken in violation of Section 54953, 54954.2, 54954.5, 54954.6, 54956 or 54956.5 has been cured or corrected by a subsequent action of the legislative body, the action filed pursuant to subdivision (a) shall be dismissed with prejudice.

(f) The fact that a legislative body takes a subsequent action to cure or correct an action taken pursuant to this section shall not be construed or admissible as evidence of a violation of this chapter.

Section 54960.2 Proceeding to determine the applicability of chapter to past actions of legislative body; Conditions; Cease and desist letter

(a) The district attorney or any interested person may file an action to determine the applicability of this chapter to past actions of the legislative body pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 54960 only if all of the following conditions are met:

(1) The district attorney or interested person alleging a violation of this chapter first submits a cease and desist letter by postal mail or facsimile transmission to the clerk or secretary of the legislative body being accused of the violation, as designated in the statement pertaining to that public agency on file pursuant to Section 53051, or if the agency does not have a statement on file designating a clerk or a secretary, to the chief executive officer of that agency, clearly describing the past action of the legislative body and nature of the alleged violation.

(2) The cease and desist letter required under paragraph (1) is submitted to the legislative body within nine months of the alleged violation.

(3) The time during which the legislative body may respond to the cease and desist letter pursuant to subdivision (b) has expired and the legislative body has not provided an unconditional commitment pursuant to subdivision (c).

(4) Within 60 days of receipt of the legislative body's response to the cease and desist letter, other than an unconditional commitment pursuant to subdivision (c), or within 60 days of the expiration of the time during which the legislative body may respond to the cease and desist letter pursuant to subdivision (b), whichever is earlier, the party submitting the cease and desist letter shall commence the action pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 54960 or thereafter be barred from commencing the action.

(b) The legislative body may respond to a cease and desist letter submitted pursuant to subdivision (a) within 30 days of receiving the letter. This subdivision shall not be construed to prevent the legislative body from providing an unconditional commitment pursuant to subdivision (c) at any time after the 30-day period has expired, except that in that event the court shall award court costs and reasonable attorneys' fees to the plaintiff in an action brought pursuant to this section in accordance with Section 54960.5.

(c) (1) If the legislative body elects to respond to the cease and desist letter with an unconditional commitment to cease, desist from and not repeat the past action that is alleged to violate this chapter, that response shall be in substantially the following form:

To _____:

The [name of legislative body] has received your cease and desist letter dated [date] alleging that the following described past action of the legislative body violates the Ralph M. Brown Act:

[Describe alleged past action, as set forth in the cease and desist letter submitted pursuant to subdivision (a)]

In order to avoid unnecessary litigation and without admitting any violation of the Ralph M. Brown Act, the [name of legislative body] hereby unconditionally commits that it will cease, desist from and not repeat the challenged past action as described above.

The [name of legislative body] may rescind this commitment only by a majority vote of its membership taken in open session at a regular meeting and noticed on its posted agenda as "Rescission of Brown Act Commitment." You will be provided with written notice, sent by any means or media you provide in response to this message, to whatever address or addresses you specify, of any intention to consider rescinding this commitment at least 30 days before any such regular meeting. In the event that this commitment is rescinded, you will have the right to commence legal action pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 54960 of the Government Code. That notice will be delivered to you by the same means as this commitment, or may be mailed to an address that you have designated in writing.

Very truly yours,

[Chairperson or acting chairperson of the legislative body]

(2) An unconditional commitment pursuant to this subdivision shall be approved by the legislative body in open session at a regular or special meeting as a separate item of business, and not on its consent agenda.

(3) An action shall not be commenced to determine the applicability of this chapter to any past action of the legislative body for which the legislative body has provided an unconditional commitment pursuant to this subdivision. During any action seeking a judicial determination regarding the applicability of this chapter to any past action of the legislative body pursuant to subdivision (a), if the court determines that the legislative body has provided an unconditional commitment pursuant to this subdivision, the action shall be dismissed with prejudice. Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to modify or limit the existing ability of the district attorney or any interested person to

commence an action to determine the applicability of this chapter to ongoing actions or threatened future actions of the legislative body.

(4) Except as provided in subdivision (d), the fact that a legislative body provides an unconditional commitment shall not be construed or admissible as evidence of a violation of this chapter.

(d) If the legislative body provides an unconditional commitment as set forth in subdivision (c), the legislative body shall not thereafter take or engage in the challenged action described in the cease and desist letter, except as provided in subdivision (e). Violation of this subdivision shall constitute an independent violation of this chapter, without regard to whether the challenged action would otherwise violate this chapter. An action alleging past violation or threatened future violation of this subdivision may be brought pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 54960, without regard to the procedural requirements of this section.

(e) The legislative body may resolve to rescind an unconditional commitment made pursuant to subdivision (c) by a majority vote of its membership taken in open session at a regular meeting as a separate item of business not on its consent agenda, and noticed on its posted agenda as "Rescission of Brown Act Commitment," provided that not less than 30 days prior to such regular meeting, the legislative body provides written notice of its intent to consider the rescission to each person to whom the unconditional commitment was made, and to the district attorney. Upon rescission, the district attorney or any interested person may commence an action pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 54960. An action under this subdivision may be brought pursuant to subdivision (a) of Section 54960, without regard to the procedural requirements of this section.

Section 54960.5. Costs and attorneys' fees

A court may award court costs and reasonable attorneys' fees to the plaintiff in an action brought pursuant to Section 54960, 54960.1 or 54960.2 where it is found that a legislative body of the local agency has violated this chapter. Additionally, when an action brought pursuant to Section 54960.2 is dismissed with prejudice because a legislative body has provided an unconditional commitment pursuant to paragraph (1) of subdivision (c) of that section at any time after the 30-day period for making such a commitment has expired, the court shall award court costs and reasonable attorneys' fees to the plaintiff if the filing of that action caused the legislative body to issue the unconditional commitment. The costs and fees shall be paid by the local agency and shall not become a personal liability of any public officer or employee of the local agency.

A court may award court costs and reasonable attorneys' fees to a defendant in any action brought pursuant to Section 54960 or 54960.1 where the defendant has prevailed in a final determination of such action and the court finds that the action was clearly frivolous and totally lacking in merit.

Section 54961. Meeting place with discriminatory admission policies; Identification of victim of sexual or child abuse

(a) No legislative body of a local agency shall conduct any meeting in any facility that prohibits the admittance of any person or persons, on the basis of ancestry or any characteristic listed or defined in Section 11135, or which is inaccessible to disabled persons, or where members of the public may not be present without making a payment or purchase. This section shall apply to every local agency as defined in Section 54951.

(b) No notice, agenda, announcement or report required under this chapter need identify any victim or alleged victim of tortious sexual conduct or child abuse unless the identity of the person has been publicly disclosed.

Section 54962. Prohibition against closed sessions except as expressly authorized

Except as expressly authorized by this chapter, or by Sections 1461, 1462, 32106 and 32155 of the Health and Safety Code, or by Sections 37606, 37606.1 and 37624.3 of the Government Code as they apply to hospitals, or by any provision of the Education Code pertaining to school districts and community college districts, no closed session may be held by any legislative body of any local agency.

Section 54963. Disclosure of confidential information acquired in closed session prohibited; Disciplinary action for violation

(a) A person may not disclose confidential information that has been acquired by being present in a closed session authorized by Section 54956.7, 54956.8, 54956.86, 54956.87, 54956.9, 54957, 54957.6, 54957.8 or 54957.10 to a person not entitled to receive it, unless the legislative body authorizes disclosure of that confidential information.

(b) For purposes of this section, "confidential information" means a communication made in a closed session that is specifically related to the basis for the legislative body of a local agency to meet lawfully in closed session under this chapter.

(c) Violation of this section may be addressed by the use of such remedies as are currently available by law, including, but not limited to:

(1) Injunctive relief to prevent the disclosure of confidential information prohibited by this section.

(2) Disciplinary action against an employee who has willfully disclosed confidential information in violation of this section.

(3) Referral of a member of a legislative body who has willfully disclosed confidential information in violation of this section to the grand jury.

(d) Disciplinary action pursuant to paragraph (2) of subdivision (c) shall require that the employee in question has either received training as to the requirements of this section or otherwise has been given notice of the requirements of this section.

(e) A local agency may not take any action authorized by subdivision (c) against a person, nor shall it be deemed a violation of this section, for doing any of the following:

(1) Making a confidential inquiry or complaint to a district attorney or grand jury concerning a perceived violation of law, including disclosing facts to a district attorney or grand jury that are necessary to establish the illegality of an action taken by a legislative body of a local agency or the potential illegality of an action that has been the subject of deliberation at a closed session if that action were to be taken by a legislative body of a local agency.

(2) Expressing an opinion concerning the propriety or legality of actions taken by a legislative body of a local agency in closed session, including disclosure of the nature and extent of the illegal or potentially illegal action.

(3) Disclosing information acquired by being present in a closed session under this chapter that is not confidential information.

(f) Nothing in this section shall be construed to prohibit disclosures under the whistleblower statutes contained in Section 1102.5 of the Labor Code or Article 4.5 (commencing with Section 53296) of Chapter 2 of this code.

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