

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 2253 Session of  
2022

INTRODUCED BY KNOWLES, JAMES, MOUL, FREEMAN AND SAPPEY,  
JANUARY 14, 2022

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT, JANUARY 14, 2022

AN ACT

1 Amending Title 53 (Municipalities Generally) of the Pennsylvania  
2 Consolidated Statutes, in general provisions, further  
3 providing for scope of subchapter, providing for definitions,  
4 further providing for establishment and designation,  
5 providing for emergency meetings by authorized  
6 telecommunications device, repealing provisions relating to  
7 exercise of powers and functions, further providing for  
8 declaration of policy and for definitions, repealing  
9 provisions relating to enabling authority for emergency  
10 interim successors for local offices, further providing for  
11 emergency interim successors for local officers and for  
12 succession period and repealing provisions relating to term  
13 and removal of designees.

14 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
15 hereby enacts as follows:

16 Section 1. Section 1121 of Title 53 of the Pennsylvania  
17 Consolidated Statutes is amended to read:

18 § 1121. Scope of subchapter.

19 This subchapter applies to all [political subdivisions]  
20 municipalities.

21 Section 2. Title 53 is amended by adding a section to read:

22 § 1121.1. Definitions.

23 The following words and phrases when used in this subchapter

1 shall have the meanings given to them in this section unless the  
2 context clearly indicates otherwise:

3 "Authorized telecommunications device." The term includes  
4 any device which permits, at a minimum, audio communication  
5 between individuals.

6 "Emergency." A disaster emergency declared under 35 Pa.C.S.  
7 § 7301 (relating to general authority of Governor) or 7501  
8 (relating to general authority of political subdivisions) that  
9 directly impacts a municipality's ability to provide services or  
10 hold a regular or special meeting of the governing body of the  
11 municipality.

12 Section 3. Section 1122 of Title 53 is amended to read:

13 § 1122. Establishment and designation.

14 Whenever, due to an emergency [resulting from the effects of  
15 enemy attack or the anticipated effects of a threatened enemy  
16 attack, it becomes imprudent, inexpedient or impossible to  
17 conduct the affairs of local government at the regular or usual  
18 place, the governing body of each political subdivision of this  
19 Commonwealth may meet at any place within or without the  
20 territorial limits of the political subdivision.] it is unsafe,

21 hazardous to human health or impossible to conduct a regular or  
22 special meeting at the location where the municipality's  
23 meetings are regularly held, the governing body of each  
24 municipality of this Commonwealth may meet at any place within  
25 the territorial limits of the municipality, within the  
26 territorial limits of an adjacent municipality or another  
27 location as near the municipality as practical. The meeting may  
28 be held on the call of the presiding officer or any two members  
29 of the governing body and shall proceed to establish and  
30 designate, by ordinance, resolution or other manner, alternate

1 or substitute sites or places as the emergency temporary  
2 location or locations of government where all or any part of the  
3 public business may be transacted and conducted during the  
4 emergency situation. These sites or places may be within or  
5 without the territorial limits of the [political subdivision]  
6 municipality and may be within or without this Commonwealth.

7 Section 4. Title 53 is amended by adding a section to read:  
8 § 1122.1. Emergency meetings by authorized telecommunications  
9 device.

10 (a) Authorization.--Whenever the governing body of a  
11 municipality is required to establish a quorum of members  
12 physically present to conduct hearings, meetings, proceedings or  
13 other business, the governing body may conduct its business  
14 through the use of an authorized telecommunications device  
15 during an emergency if the conditions that have rendered a  
16 meeting with the physical presence of the participants unsafe,  
17 hazardous to human health or impossible would be alleviated  
18 through the use of an authorized telecommunications device.

19 (b) Quorum.--Notwithstanding any other provision of law, a  
20 hearing, meeting, proceeding or other business conducted through  
21 an authorized telecommunications device under this subsection  
22 shall not require the physical presence at a meeting location of  
23 a quorum of the participating members if a quorum is otherwise  
24 established by the participating members through the authorized  
25 telecommunications device.

26 (c) Advance notice.--The governing body of a municipality  
27 shall post no less than 12 hours advance notice of each meeting  
28 conducted under subsection (a) on the entity's publicly  
29 accessible Internet website, if any, or in an advertisement in a  
30 newspaper of general circulation, or both. Public notice shall

1 include the date, time, technology to be used and public  
2 participation information as provided under subsection (d). The  
3 governing body shall comply with any other notification  
4 requirement of 65 Pa.C.S. Ch. 7 (relating to open meetings) to  
5 the extent practicable.

6 (d) Public participation.--To the extent practicable, the  
7 governing body of a municipality shall allow for public  
8 participation in a meeting, hearing or proceeding through an  
9 authorized telecommunications device.

10 (e) Extended emergency meeting authorizations prohibited.--  
11 The authorization to conduct meetings by authorized  
12 telecommunications device under this section shall expire after  
13 the 21st consecutive day following the emergency declaration  
14 unless the governing body of the municipality establishes by  
15 resolution that meeting by authorized telecommunications device  
16 is essential to comply with a disaster emergency declaration or  
17 proclamation of the Governor as extended by the General  
18 Assembly.

19 Section 5. Section 1123 of Title 53 is repealed:

20 [§ 1123. Exercise of powers and functions.

21 During the period when the public business is being conducted  
22 at the emergency temporary location or locations, the governing  
23 body and other officers of a political subdivision of this  
24 Commonwealth shall exercise at the location or locations all of  
25 the executive, legislative and judicial powers and functions  
26 conferred upon the governing body and officers by law. These  
27 powers and functions may be exercised in the light of the  
28 exigencies of the emergency situation without regard to time-  
29 consuming procedures and formalities prescribed by law and  
30 pertaining to them, and all acts of the governing body and

1 officers shall be as valid and binding as if performed within  
2 the territorial limits of their political subdivision.]

3 Section 6. Section 1132 of Title 53 is amended to read:

4 § 1132. Declaration of policy.

5 [Because of the existing possibility of attack upon the  
6 United States of unprecedented size and destructiveness and in  
7 order, in the event of such an attack, to] To assure continuity  
8 of government through legally constituted authority and  
9 responsibility in offices of the municipalities of this  
10 Commonwealth, to provide for the effective operation of  
11 government during an emergency and to facilitate the early  
12 resumption of functions temporarily suspended, it is found and  
13 declared to be necessary to provide for emergency interim  
14 succession to offices of the municipalities of this Commonwealth  
15 in the event the incumbents and their deputies authorized to  
16 exercise all of the powers and discharge the duties of these  
17 offices, referred to in this subchapter as deputies, are  
18 unavailable to exercise the powers and perform the duties of  
19 these offices.

20 Section 7. The definition of "attack" in section 1133 of  
21 Title 53 is amended and the section is amended by adding a  
22 definition to read:

23 § 1133. Definitions.

24 The following words and phrases when used in this subchapter  
25 shall have the meanings given to them in this section unless the  
26 context clearly indicates otherwise:

27 ["Attack." Any attack on the United States which causes or  
28 may cause substantial damage or injury to civilian persons or  
29 property in any manner by sabotage or by the use of bombs,  
30 missiles or shellfire or by atomic, radiological, chemical,

bacteriological or biological means or other weapons or processes.]

"Emergency." A disaster emergency declared under 35 Pa.C.S. § 7301 (relating to general authority of Governor) or 7501 (relating to general authority of political subdivisions).

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Section 8. Section 1134 of Title 53 is repealed:

[§ 1134. Enabling authority for emergency interim successors for local offices.]

With respect to local offices for which the legislative bodies of municipalities may enact resolutions or ordinances relative to the manner in which vacancies will be filled or temporary appointments to office made, the legislative bodies are authorized to enact resolutions or ordinances providing for emergency interim successors to offices. The resolutions and ordinances shall not be inconsistent with this subchapter.]

Section 9. Sections 1135 and 1137 of Title 53 are amended to read:

§ 1135. Emergency interim successors for local officers.

This section is applicable to officers of municipalities not included in section 1134 (relating to enabling authority for emergency interim successors for local offices). Each officer[, subject to any regulations as the executive head of the municipality may issue, shall] may designate by title[, if feasible, or by named person] one or more emergency interim successors and specify their order of succession. The officer shall review and revise, as necessary, designations made pursuant to this subchapter. [The officer will designate a sufficient number of persons so that there will be not less than three deputies or emergency interim successors or any

combination of them.] If any officer or deputy of any municipality is unavailable, the powers of the office shall be exercised and the duties discharged by his designated emergency interim successors in the order specified. The emergency interim successors, in the order specified, shall exercise the powers and discharge the duties of the office to which designated until the vacancy is filled in accordance with the Constitution of Pennsylvania or statutes or until the officer, or his deputy or a preceding emergency interim successor, ceases to be unavailable.

§ 1137. Succession period.

Emergency interim successors may exercise the powers and discharge the duties of an office as authorized in this subchapter only [after an attack has occurred. The General Assembly, by concurrent resolution, may terminate the] during an emergency. The authority of the emergency interim successors to exercise the powers and discharge the duties of office as provided under this subchapter shall terminate on the selection, appointment or election of a permanent successor as required by law.

Section 10. Section 1138 of Title 53 is repealed:

[§ 1138. Term and removal of designees.

Until the persons designated as emergency interim successors are authorized to exercise the powers and discharge the duties of an office in accordance with this subchapter, including section 1137 (relating to succession period), these persons may be removed or replaced by the designating authority at any time, with or without cause.]

Section 11. This act shall take effect in 60 days.