

RESOLUTION # 2012 - 73

RESOLUTION OF THE MAYOR AND BOROUGH COUNCIL OF THE BOROUGH OF MOUNT ARLINGTON, IN THE COUNTY OF MORRIS, STATE OF NEW JERSEY, OPPOSING SENATE BILLS #1451 AND #1452

WHEREAS, legislation has been introduced to reform and modernize both the Open Public Meetings Act (S-1451) and the Open Public Records Act (S-1452); and

WHEREAS, the Governing Body of the Borough of Mount Arlington agrees with and supports the statement that “the right of the public to be present at all meetings of public bodies, and to witness in full detail all phases of the deliberation, policy formulation, and decision making of public bodies, is vital to the enhancement and proper functioning of the democratic process”; and

WHEREAS, the changes, however, proposed in S-1451 will not only be a cost driver for local and State government but make government less effective; and

WHEREAS, S-1451 includes a number of proposed requirements which involve costly unfunded mandates, impractical requirements and impediments to the democratic process, including the following:

- A new definition of subcommittees that expands subcommittees to be overly inclusive so that, for example, even research projects assigned to one member of a public body could be covered; and
- A new requirement that all subcommittees meetings include notice of their meeting and the preparation of minutes, which would, among other things, necessitate additional administrative support for all meetings of subcommittees as well as increased legal advertising cost; and
- A new requirement that agendas provide a description of all agenda items, including the names of parties to and approximate dollar amounts of any contracts to be acted upon, which will delay the award of contracts and could lead to the loss of grant monies; and
- A new requirement that the governing body may discuss, but not act upon, an item brought up by a citizen at a public meeting if it was not published as an agenda item, that not only runs contrary to the time honored tradition of holding a public meeting for the very purpose of soliciting such input and acting upon it but is impractical, ineffective and unnecessarily inhibits the operations of municipal government; and
- A new requirement for advance notification of estimated start times for the public portion of the meeting and the portion of the meeting from which the public is to be excluded that is unworkable and disruptive; and
- A new requirement that recordings of meetings become a part of the minutes that renders the recordings a permanent municipal record and is not only counter to the already-established records retention schedule of Division of Archive and

Records Management for such records but which will be costly to preserve the records to ensure that they are permanent; and

- A new requirement that electronic communications, such as e-mails and text messages, concerning public business among an effective majority of the members that occurred prior to a meeting become part of the minutes and renders the recordings a permanent municipal record, is unworkable and unmanageable as the technology does not always exist to make “hard copies” or digital copies of text messages and the records custodian does not always have access to them, and which is an unprecedented expansion of the meeting concept; and
- A new requirement that public bodies be permitted to exclude the public from discussion of personnel matters only with the written consent of the employee and potentially affected employees which will inhibit the public bodies’ ability to take necessary actions on personnel matters and could lead to costly litigation; and
- A new requirement that comprehensive minutes that must include each member’s stated reason for their actions or vote, the identity of each member of the public who spoke, and summary of what was said, be made available to the public as soon as possible but no later than 45 days after the meeting that will not only be costly but the historical value of minutes will be lost in order to meet an arbitrary deadline; and

WHEREAS, the Governing Body of the Borough of Mount Arlington agrees that government records should be readily accessible and transparent but there must be an appropriate balance between the need for openness and transparency in government and citizens’ reasonable expectation of privacy; and

WHEREAS, among the costly unfunded mandates and impractical new requirements of S-1452 are the following:

- The expansion of the definition of government record to include records that are required by law to be made, maintained or kept on file by any public agency that will lead to a records custodians to be in violation of OPRA for the non-existence of a government records created before their tenure with the public body; and
- The creation of a definition for “advisory, consultative or deliberative” material that may be contrary to the well established definition in case law leading to costly litigation; and
- The expanding of the definition of government record to include electronic communications, such as e-mails and text messages, concerning public business among an effective majority of the members that occurred prior to a meeting that is unworkable and unmanageable as the technology does not always exist to make “hard copies” or digital copies of text messages, the records custodian does not always have access to the electronic communications and certain cell phone carriers will not provide this information without a subpoena; and
- The inclusion of a subjective definition for “reasonable” that may be contrary to the well established definition in case law leading to costly litigation; and
- A new requirement that any video or audio recordings or public meetings should be available in unedited form will be in direct violation of the Open Public

Meetings Act requirement that requires the redacting of discussions in closed session until the matter can legally be released; and

- A new requirement on how to handle redactions and special services fees is time consuming and costly, especially considering that the Government Records Council has already addressed these procedures in their Custodians' Toolkit, which should be codified; and
- A provision that permits the records custodian to advise a requestor that a government record is readily available on the public agency's website; however, the bill requires the records custodian to directly provide the records to the requestor if they do not have access to a computer but does not define what is meant by "access to a computer"; and
- A new costly requirement that when there is a special service charge the requestor must be provided, at no cost, an index generally describing the responsive government records to be provided and to the greatest extent possible the index shall include the name of each record or brief description of the record or general categories of records, a detailed breakdown of how the special charges were assessed and if records are exempt or redacted, the records custodian must provide a description of those records; and
- A provision that prohibits the assessment of a special service charge for requests for budgets, bills, vouchers, contracts and public employee salaries and overtime unless the request is deemed voluminous, which is undefined and subjective; and

WHEREAS, the provisions of S-1451 and S-1452 place financial, time, manpower and other burdens on municipalities at a time when municipalities are forced to layoff municipal employees, impose furloughs and reduce departmental budgets so that municipalities can meet the strict CAP requirements with decreased revenues and increasing operating expense; and

WHEREAS, the totality of the new requirements of S-1451 and S-1452 will be a significant cost driver for local and State government with no known appropriation contemplated or any alternate means to offset these costs, such a reasonable increase in fees; and

WHEREAS, while the Governing Body of the Borough of Mount Arlington strives for and agrees that open and transparent government is essential to the democratic process, the provisions of S-1451 and S-1452 will make government inefficient;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Mayor and Borough Council of the Borough of Mount Arlington, County of Morris, and State of New Jersey, for reasons stated above, does hereby oppose S-1451 and S-1452, as currently drafted, and strongly urges the State Senate and Assembly to oppose these bills; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this duly adopted resolution be forwarded to Senate President Stephen Sweeney, Senator Loretta Weinberg, Senator Barbara Buono, Senator Shirley Turner, Assembly Speaker Shelia Oliver, Assemblyman Gordon Johnson, Assemblyman Upendra Chivukula, the legislators of the 25th State

Legislative District, Governor Chris Christie, the New Jersey State League of Municipalities and the Municipal Clerks' Association of New Jersey.

I hereby certify this to be an accurate and true resolution as approved by the Mayor and Borough Council at the Meeting held on May 1, 2012.



Linda DeSantis, RMC
Borough Clerk