

Resolution 2011-176

RESOLUTION IN OPPOSITION TO SENATE BILL NO. 1351

WHEREAS, Senate Bill No. 1351 (hereinafter referred to as S-1351) would amend the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6, et seq., to include many new requirements that are unnecessary to protect the public's interest in open and transparent government, and which would unduly burden municipalities; and,

WHEREAS, S-1351 would impose new procedural requirements on municipalities which will be time consuming and costly, at a time when municipalities are facing unprecedented financial constraints; and,

WHEREAS, S-1351 would impose new procedural requirements on municipalities that are impractical and wasteful, and which would result in longer meetings and less efficient governance; and,

WHEREAS, among the time consuming, costly, impractical and wasteful new requirements of S-1351 are the following:

- A. new requirements pertaining to subcommittees, including notice of subcommittee meetings and the preparation of minutes, which would, among other things, necessitate additional administrative support for all meetings of subcommittees so that minutes can be prepared; and,
- B. new requirement that agendas provide a description of all agenda items, including the names of the parties to and approximate dollar amounts of any contracts to be acted upon, which would increase preparation time for agendas; and,

- C. new requirement that agendas include estimated starting times for the public portion of the meeting and the portion of the meeting from which the public is to be excluded, though this information would be purely speculative and unreliable; and,
- D. new requirement that no public body be permitted to act upon or discuss a matter that is not listed on the agenda except in emergencies, which requirement would be impractical and unnecessarily inhibit the operations of municipal government, as it is often necessary for the effective and efficient administration of municipal governmental purposes to discuss or act on matters for which three business days' notice may not be possible; and this would effectively prevent discussion of items brought forward by the public; and,
- E. new requirement that a public body provide for public comment on emergency items that are added to a meeting agenda, adding unnecessary and time-consuming process to meetings; and,
- F. new requirement that a public body provide for public comment before taking final action on any matter at any meeting of at least three minutes per person, which requirement, as written, would result in an unworkable series of public comment periods on every action of the governing body, from appointments to resolutions to approval of minutes, thereby adding substantial time to every meeting of the public body; and,
- G. new requirement eliminating attorney-client privilege as a basis for excluding the public from a portion of the meeting, which will inhibit the public body's ability to obtain needed legal advice, which is contrary to the public interest; and,

- H. new requirement that public bodies be permitted to exclude the public from discussion of personnel matters only with the written consent of the potentially affected employee, thereby inhibiting the public body's ability to take necessary actions on personnel matters; and,
- I. new requirements for more extensive minutes of public body meetings, such as the inclusion of each member's stated reasons for his or her actions or vote, the identity of each member of the public who spoke and a summary of what was said, which shall cause the preparation of minutes to be more time consuming and costly; and,
- J. confusing new requirements pertaining to disclosure of recordings of meetings, including making recordings promptly available after meetings, and somehow incorporating such recordings with meeting minutes; and,
- K. new requirements that minutes would include electronic communications concerning public business among an effective majority of the members that occurred prior to a meeting, which would be an unworkable and ineffective imposition on municipalities, and would purport to make pre-meeting communications somehow become part of the meeting itself, an unprecedented expansion of the meeting concept; and,
- L. new requirements for maintaining on the municipal website schedules of meetings, agendas, notices of emergency meetings, minutes, resolutions and ordinance to the extent not already set forth in the minutes, and closed meetings resolutions, for a period of at least five years, which would result in additional costs for posting and maintaining website information;

WHEREAS, there is no justifiable basis for the imposition of the burdensome and cost generative provisions of S-1351; and,

WHEREAS, portions of S-1351 place financial, time, manpower and other burdens on municipalities at a time when municipalities are constrained to layoff municipal employees, impose furloughs, and reduce departmental budgets so that municipalities can meet strict CAP requirements even when revenues are decreased and operating costs continue to climb; and,

WHEREAS, the cost generative provisions of S-1351 are unfunded mandates that violate the “State Mandate, State Pay” amendment to the New Jersey Constitution;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Township Committee of the Township of Ocean, County of Ocean, and State of New Jersey, for the reasons stated above, do hereby opposes Senate Bill No. 1351 in its current form, and urge the New Jersey State Senate and Assembly to oppose this Bill; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be forwarded to State Senator Loretta Weinberg, State Senator Stephen Sweeney, the members of the Senate and Budget Appropriations Committee, the legislators of the 9th State Legislative District, the New Jersey State League of Municipalities, and the Municipal Clerks’ Association of New Jersey.

CERTIFICATION

I Diane B. Ambrosio, RMC, Clerk of the Township of Ocean, County of Ocean, do hereby certify the foregoing Resolution to be a true copy of a Resolution adopted by the Township Committee of the Township of Ocean on the 12th day of May 2011.

Diane B. Ambrosio, RMC
Township Clerk