

New Law Allows Meeting By Video Conference

Effective Sept. 1, 1997, the Texas Open Meetings Act will allow the meetings of governmental bodies to be conducted by video conference call.

Senate Bill 839, as passed by the Legislature, formally legalizes such meetings but, at the same time, sets forth precise conditions for meetings by video conference call. Specially, under the new law, a meeting may be held by video conference call only if a quorum of the governmental body is physically present at one of the locations of the meeting.

The notice for the video conference meeting must meet all of the notice requirements of the Open Meetings Act and must specify the location where a quorum of the governmental body will be physically present, as well as each location where a member will be participating via video conference call. Each of the meeting locations must be open to the public during the open portions of the meeting.

In addition, each portion of the video conference meeting required to be open to the public must be visible and audible to the public at each location of the meeting. The governmental body is also required to make a tape recording of the meeting available to the public.

Lastly, SB 839 requires the Department of Information Resources to specify by rules certain minimum standards for the audio and video signals for such video conference call meetings.

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