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February 23, 2021

SB 561: Electric Cooperatives – Meetings – Alterations

Committee: Senate Finance

Position: SUPPORT

Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative (SMECO), a member-owned electric cooperative based in Hughesville that provides electricity to more than 166,000 customers in Charles, St. Mary's, Calvert and southern Prince George's County, supports SB 561. This bill will allow SMECO to hold its Annual Meeting in person, virtually or with a combination of in person and virtual attendance. Under the bill, a person who is unable to attend the meeting in person will be able to participate virtually and count towards the requisite quorum of 50 members in attendance.

One of the lasting lessons of this pandemic is that virtual meetings are here to stay, and we want to embrace this trend to offer another way for our cooperative members to participate in the Annual Meeting. Our Annual Meeting is a good opportunity for members to hear an update from SMECO's President and CEO, our Board Chairman and to ask questions. Modern technology has taught us that attending a meeting in person should not be the only way to participate.

We hosted our annual meeting in 2020 in one of our truck bays in Hughesville where chairs could be spread apart to meet social distance guidelines, but those who could not attend or did not feel comfortable in attending did not have the opportunity to participate in the meeting. SB 561 will address that.

SB 561 is about convenience and inclusion for SMECO members. When it makes sense, we plan to continue to allow members to participate in person but we want to make sure those who are unable to attend can participate virtually.

Following the passage of this bill, our plan is to propose a change to our bylaws during the 2021 Annual Meeting to reflect the change in participation requirements. If that bylaw change is adopted, the new meeting format can be implemented for the 2022 Annual Meeting.

In conclusion, we want to thank Sen. Hershey, Sen. Eckardt and the entire Southern Maryland Delegation for their support of this bill.

We ask for a favorable report on SB 561.

For more information, contact: Tom Dennison, SMECO

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