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## **IPIB Monthly Column**

March 5, 2021

### **From the Iowa Public Information Board**

By Margaret E. Johnson, Executive Director

**Question:** Can a governmental body covered by Chapter 21 use a secret ballot?

**Answer:** No. Iowa Code section 21.3 states: “The minutes shall show the results of each vote taken and information sufficient to indicate the vote of each member present. The vote of each member present shall be made public at the open session. The minutes shall be public records open to public inspection.”

It would be acceptable to record a vote as unanimous in the minutes of a meeting, or passed with only [names] dissenting/abstaining, as long as the members present and voting are noted in the minutes. Some matters may require a roll call vote, such as voting to enter into a closed session or voting on an ordinance or resolution.

A public agency might be tempted to use written ballots on particularly sensitive and controversial matters, but it is precisely on such matters that the votes of individual members should be publicly announced and recorded. If a written ballot is used for any reason, the vote must be read aloud at the meeting, along with the name of each voter, in order to avoid a violation of Iowa Code chapter 21.

***Did You Know*** that the Iowa Public Information Board staff is available to assist you with questions or problems involving open meetings and public records in Iowa? During the month of February 2021, 54 contacts were made with the Iowa Public Information Board office.

TYPE	February 2021
Formal complaints	7
Advisory opinions	0
Declaratory orders	0
Informal complaints	7
Informal requests	37
Miscellaneous	3
TOTAL:	54

#### **Board Members**

Joan Corbin • E. J. Giovannetti • Barry Lindahl • Keith Luchtel • Monica McHugh  
Frederick Morain • Julie Pottorff • Suzan Stewart • Stan Thompson

**Who can contact the IPIB and how long does it take?** Any person can contact the IPIB for assistance by telephone (515-725-1781), by email, or on the IPIB website. So far in 2021, 103 identifiable people have contacted the IPIB. Of these, 55 were private citizens, 40 were government officials or employees, and 8 were members of the media. In 2021, 72% of the incoming contacts were resolved the first day, 14% were resolved in one to five days, and 14% were resolved in six or more days. Opinions, rulings, FAQs, reports, and training documents are available on the IPIB website – [www.ipib.iowa.gov](http://www.ipib.iowa.gov).