

A BILL FOR THE  
GENERAL SYNOD PRESENCE (AMENDMENT) CANON 2025

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

GENERAL OVERVIEW

This bill is for a canon to amend the General Synod Presence Canon 2022 to allow a person unable to attend General Synod in person by reason of their disability or medical condition to participate instead by videoconference.

**BACKGROUND**

The General Synod Presence Canon 2022 (the Canon) was passed at the Eighteenth Session of General Synod to provide the option of all General Synods to be conducted (wholly or partly) by videoconference in certain circumstances.

The Canon provides that when a Synod is taking place *partly* by videoconference (ie: a hybrid meeting), Synod members would only be certified to participate by videoconference on the grounds that they were unable to attend in person at all, or could only attend in person with significant and onerous impediments, due to the laws of the Commonwealth or a State or Territory.

The Canon does not provide members of General Synod with a choice to participate in a hybrid session according to their personal preference, or because of the other reasons that would ordinarily cause them to have to be replaced as a representative by their diocese. Should a member be unable to participate, either in person or by videoconference, the diocese is still able to appoint an alternate member.

Before the Canon was passed in its original form, proposed amendments to extend the grounds to certify members to attend General Synod by videoconference were considered. It was determined that further consideration was required and the General Synod passed the following resolution:

Resolution GS93/18

*That this Synod requests the Standing Committee to develop the reasonably required measures, including legislation, to enable greater accessible participation, including online and in-person attendance in meetings of the General Synod, particularly by persons unable to attend or participate physically in such meetings by reasons such as disability, disease or illness, medical condition or injury and that any legislation required be presented to a special session of General Synod, held by video conference, at least one year before the next ordinary session of General Synod.*

The Bill proposes to add to the grounds to allow participation by videoconference to include “by reason of their disability or serious medical condition”.

## NOTES ON CLAUSES

- Clause 1 provides for the title of the canon.
- Clause 2 adds to the grounds on which under section 4(1) of the General Synod Presence Canon a member of General Synod can seek a certificate that they are prevented from or will face significant and onerous impediments in travelling to or from or being at a session of the General Synod: the additional ground is “by reason of their disability or serious medical condition”.
- Clause 3 amends section 4(2)(a) of the General Synod Presence Canon regarding the obligations of the General Synod where there is a hybrid meeting. The current Canon requires the General Secretary to provide “the means of participating”. This could potentially lead to claims for IT equipment or adequate connectivity. A proposed amendment to require the General Secretary to provide “the opportunity to participate”, meaning that the obligation is to only put in place the videoconferencing facilities and associated technologies (such as electronic voting).

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The General Synod prescribes as follows:

**Title**

1. This canon is the General Synod Presence (Amendment) Canon 2025.

**Grounds of application to include disability or medical condition**

2. In section 4(1)(c) of the General Synod Presence Canon after the words “a State or a Territory” insert “or by reason of their disability or serious medical condition”.

**Obligations of General Secretary**

3. In section 4(2)(a) of the General Synod Presence Canon for “the means of participating” substitute “the opportunity to participate”.
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