

Assembly Measures to Facilitate Public Health and Participation in the Legislative Process During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Assembly cares about the health of its Members, staff, and the public, and deeply respects the public's right to attend legislative proceedings. Accordingly, the Assembly has taken extensive and multifaceted action to ensure that Members, staff, and the public can safely participate in the legislative process during the era of COVID-19. Here is a summary of the steps we have taken:

- Members will attend hearings in-person but only in rooms, including the Chamber, large enough to accommodate them with physical distancing.
- The Capitol will have health screening at the entrance and controlled movement to committee rooms to preserve physical distancing. Hand sanitizer is to be made available in all spaces used by the public.
- There is limited in-person seating in committee rooms to accommodate physical distancing. Because of this, we strongly encourage usage of web and phone options, described below, rather than in-person testimony.
- Those individuals who attend the hearings in-person will have the opportunity to offer comment in the room.
- There is continued access to the web-based Position Letter Portal for advocates and individuals to register their positions on bills.
- Public Comment and witness testimony may be submitted through a dedicated phone service.
- Witness Videoconferencing Rooms (WVRs) in the Capitol will have dedicated remote, secure videoconferencing devices for hearing live testimony from witnesses in support of and opposition to bills. This will preserve safe physical distancing. These rooms allow invited witnesses to provide testimony on bills without having to attend public hearing rooms in-person.

Hearing Attendance by Members

Members will attend hearings in-person and sit either on the dais or in the Chamber with proper physical distancing. Staff attendance will be limited to exclude all but essential personnel. Committee rooms will be cleaned prior to every hearing and microphone covers will be provided. The Assembly Chamber will be used for larger committees to make certain they can still meet with appropriate physical distancing.

Health Screening and Controlled Movement in the Capitol

Capitol nurses and Assembly Sergeants will be posted at the Capitol entrances to ask public health screening questions and administer voluntary temperature checks. Access to the Capitol will occur in queues that are marked for appropriate physical distancing. Sergeants will direct members of the public to elevators where only one person will be allowed per elevator. Posted signage will encourage physical distancing and direct attendees to the committee rooms while limiting access to the rest of the Capitol.

Limited Public Access to Committee Rooms

Seating in all hearing rooms is measured and marked with signage for physical distancing. Once the pre-determined capacity for a room has been reached, no other individuals will be allowed in the room. Sergeants, and in some cases CHP, will be on-hand to ensure physical distancing.

In-Person Public Comment

This will be available to a limited number of individuals who will be admitted until the hearing room reaches capacity. These individuals can offer public comment in the hearing room, but will do so behind a stanchion and a Plexiglas shield, which protects the public and staff.

Position Letter Portal

The public and advocates can continue to make use of our widely used position letter web portal to submit letters and comments to committees for inclusion in committee analyses.

Public Comment by Phone

Individuals may call in and speak on bills from any location. The Assembly will use a moderated phone service to queue up individuals and organize them for comment during hearings.

Supporters, opponents, and pre-selected witnesses may call in, offer perspective and make their voices heard. This also opens up comment to underserved communities or those who may lack access to the internet. Additionally, committee staff will be standing by to assist any individuals with technical issues using the call-in service.

Witness Videoconference Rooms (WVRs)

Chairs, authors, advocates, and committee staff will work together to select witnesses for both support and opposition on bills. While these witnesses have the option of calling their testimony in, they may also make use of WVRs on the first floor of the Capitol, in Rooms 125, 126, and 127. WVRs enable selected support and opposition witnesses to testify using hygienic, touch-free videoconference devices spaced for physical distancing, and provided by the Assembly.

Witness testimony from the WVR will be displayed on a TV screen in the hearing room. The witnesses in the WVR will be able to see and interact with the Chair and committee Members, including answering any questions they may have. Witnesses waiting to testify on the next two bills to come up in the hearing can wait safely in seats marked for physical distancing in the room. Additional marked seats will be available in the halls outside the WVRs and a special exit will be opened to facilitate orderly exit from the building with safe physical distancing, after witnesses have testified.

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