



The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401-1991

MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate of Maryland

FROM: Bill Ferguson 
Senate President

DATE: February 8, 2022

RE: Return to In-Person Committee Hearings

As discussed over the last several weeks and noted in the January 5th 2022 Regular Session Information and Protocols, my goal has been to return to in-person committee hearings on February 14th if safe to do so. Based on the marked improvements seen in current COVID-19 statistics and data and guidance from public health experts, I believe we can move forward with this plan safely.

Beginning February 14th, standing committee hearings will be in-person and members of the public will have access to the seating in committee rooms. All standing committee hearings and voting will be live-streamed on the Maryland General Assembly (MGA) website. The full Senate of Maryland will continue convening in person in the Senate Chamber. Masks will still be required in all areas of the Legislative Complex, weekly testing requirements will remain, and seating will be limited in the seating areas of committee rooms.

Below are guidelines that review the protocols for the Senate of Maryland effective February 14th. Please know that I am committed to protecting the health of all members, staff, and the public, and will continue monitoring the situation. As always, thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

Masking Policy

All members and staff must continue to wear face masks to gain entrance to any legislative building, and consistently in all public spaces regardless of vaccination status. This includes

members when speaking on the floor, as well as witnesses when testifying. In single member/staff offices, or when alone in a suite, legislators and staff may work without a face mask.

In addition, any individual who needs to gain entrance to or attend a meeting in the State House or Legislative Services, Senate, or House buildings must wear a face mask consistently in all public spaces of those buildings, regardless of vaccination status.

All members, staff, and individuals visiting the Legislative Complex are strongly encouraged to wear a surgical mask or KN95 mask. The Senate President's Office will provide a KN95 mask to any member or staff who requests it.

Mandatory Testing and Testing Site

All Senate members and staff who are on the Legislative Complex more than three days a week will still be required to submit to weekly testing. Members must have a negative COVID-19 test within 30 hours of each Tuesday morning floor session. Senate staff must test each week. Testing will continue to be available at the Maryland Department of Health testing site on the B Lot throughout the 2022 Session. The testing site remains open Monday through Friday between 8:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. There are appointment blocks reserved only for Maryland General Assembly members and designated staff each day between 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. To sign up for a testing appointment, please visit <https://portal.ciandx.com/main/patient>.

Members may comply with the weekly testing requirement by taking an antigen or rapid test within 30 hours of the Tuesday floor session if: (1) the member's name is clearly written on the front of the test; (2) the full date and time of sample are written on the front of the test; and (3) the member presents a picture of the test with the required information and negative test result before entering the Chamber on Tuesday mornings.

Notification of COVID-19 Exposure or Positive Test Result

All staff must report any positive COVID-19 test result or exposure to their supervisors and Human Resources. All members must report any positive COVID-19 test result or exposure to the Office of the Senate President and Human Resources.

Please follow [current Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines](#) regarding masking, testing, quarantining, and isolation after a positive COVID-19 test result or COVID-19 exposure.

Vaccination Policy and COVID-19 Screening App

All members and employees of the Maryland General Assembly, including those working remotely, are still required to be vaccinated or to submit to weekly COVID-19 testing. This does not include receiving a booster shot, although employees who participated in the \$100 COVID-19 vaccine incentive program must obtain a booster shot when eligible under the program. All employees of the General Assembly are still highly encouraged to get a booster shot when eligible.

Please remember that members and employees must **download and use the Maryland General Assembly (MGA) COVID-19 Screening app** to gain entry to the Senate Garage or Legislative Complex. The app will request proof of vaccination, or a negative COVID-19 test result. If you or your staff are having difficulty with the app, please contact the Office of Information Systems at 410-946-5300.

Public Access

Senate Chamber

To ensure public transparency and remain consistent with current State House visitor policies, members of the public will continue to be allowed to access the gallery of the Senate Chamber. Seating will be spaced to provide physical distance in the gallery. In addition, reserved spaces in the gallery for press will remain, as well as limited space on the Senate Chamber floor for press.

Only members, desk officers, committee managers, press, Senate President's Office staff, and approved guests may access the Senate Chamber floor.

The Senate will continue allowing resolutions and acknowledgments of guests by members. Please contact my office if you have any questions or concerns.

Miller and James Senate Office Buildings

The Miller and James Senate Office Buildings will continue to be open to the public. Beginning on February 14th, seating in the committee rooms will be open to the public but spaced to provide physical distance between seats. We ask that staff and members of the public allow those who have signed up to testify to sit in the audience in the committee room and, if necessary, leave the committee room when finished testifying if there are no seats available in the audience. Committee rooms will continue to have air purifiers. The Maryland State Police Legislative Security Section will provide troopers for security and enforcement of guidelines during all committee hearings and outside of committee rooms.

Member and Committee Offices

Although the Senate office buildings will remain open to the public, members may not have more than four individuals who are *not* staff or members in the office at one time.

In addition, members and committees may continue to implement additional protocols for their offices, such as requiring appointments before meeting with members of the public, holding virtual-only meetings, or requiring proof of vaccination prior to doing an in-person office meeting.

Committee Protocols

Committee Hearings and Briefings

Beginning on February 14th, committee hearings and briefings will be held in person.

Most committees will continue to hold bill hearings on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. Committee chairs will still determine witness guidelines such as witness testimony length and late testimony. Please refer to each committee's guidelines for their rules regarding late written testimony. Late sign-up for oral testimony may be allowed at the discretion of committee chairs under extraordinary circumstances.

Due to the logistical challenge of appropriately streaming in-person and Zoom testimony simultaneously, we will not be allowing hybrid testimony for bill hearings. In extraordinary circumstances, Chairs may, at their discretion, allow pre-recorded video testimony. Individuals may submit electronic written testimony if they cannot testify in person.

Please reference the committee guidelines for additional information on committee protocols, which are available on the MGA website on each committee page.

Witness Sign-up

All witnesses, including sponsor witnesses, still must sign up to testify through the MGA website and [create a "MyMGA" account](#).

Beginning February 14th, witness sign-up will begin the business day *before* the hearing at 4:00 p.m. and continue until the morning of the hearing at 10:00 a.m. Witnesses who only want to provide written testimony must also create a "MyMGA" account and submit testimony through the website. Please note that if a witness is a sponsor witness, the witness should indicate that you are providing written *AND* oral testimony.

Sponsors must continue to complete the sponsor witness form. The witness form must be submitted by 10:00 a.m. the day before the hearing. Sponsors also should only sign up as providing written testimony.

Audio visual presentations will only be allowed from the bill sponsor and must be provided at least 24 hours in advance of the hearing date.

Voting Sessions

Voting sessions for each committee will continue to be scheduled at the discretion of the Committee Chairs. Members will participate in voting sessions in person from committee rooms. While not legally required, voting sessions will be live-streamed on the MGA website. When feasible, voting sessions and voting lists will be available in the MGA hearing schedule 24 hours in advance of a voting session. The outcome of a voting session will be published in the MGA hearing after a voting session.

Public Bill Files

The public can continue to request an electronic copy of a public bill file by emailing the committee manager for the committee assigned to the bill. Witness testimony and the oral witness list will be available the day after the bill is heard in committee. Any additional materials will be available after the bill passes third reader on the Senate floor. Written testimony will also be available through the MGA website when the bill is on the Senate floor for third reader. For bills that do not pass out of a committee, written testimony will be available on the website after the legislative session. For prior year bill files, please contact the Department of Legislative Services Library at 410-946-5400.

Committee Dinners and Receptions

Committee dinners will be allowed at the discretion of the Chair of each committee or delegation and receptions will not be prohibited. **All hosts of dinners or receptions are strongly encouraged to prioritize safety by limiting capacity at events and requiring masking throughout the duration of the event.** Hosts are advised that due to COVID-19, attendance may be very limited.

Senate Floor Schedule

The Senate of Maryland will continue convening in person. Members should plan to be on the floor Monday through Friday during the following times, understanding that there could be occasions when there is only a pro forma session:

- Mondays – 8:00 p.m.
- Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays – 10:00 a.m.
- Fridays – 11:00 a.m.

Security

Security of the Legislative Complex remains a top priority. As such, the Maryland State Police Legislative Security Section will be providing troopers for security during all committee hearings. The Maryland Capitol Police will continue to provide security as well. Please remember that picture IDs are required for entrance into any building and metal detectors are in operation for members of the public. **All MGA members and staff must wear their State IDs visibly at all times.** For school groups, adults need photo IDs, but students do not. Backpacks and other bags will be searched.