




The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401-1991

MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate of Maryland

FROM: Bill Ferguson 
Senate President

DATE: January 5, 2022

RE: **2022 Regular Session Information and Protocols**

As you are aware, the 2022 Session begins Wednesday, January 12th at noon. It is my goal that the Senate of Maryland allows as much public access as is safely possible. To that end, below are guidelines and protocols for the upcoming session. The full Senate of Maryland will convene in person in the Senate Chamber. Senate committee briefings and hearings will be virtual through February 11th. Only members of the press will have access to seating in committee rooms through February 11th. Beginning February 14th, committee hearings will be in-person and members of the public will have access to the seating in committee rooms. Committee voting sessions will be held in person for members but will be closed to the public through February 11th. Only members of the press will have access to the seating in committee rooms during this time. Committee sessions, however, will be live-streamed during this time.

Please know that I am closely monitoring COVID-19 data throughout the State. Due to the constantly changing nature of the pandemic, some of these guidelines could change. Should that happen, I will notify each of you. As always, thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

Mandatory Testing and Testing Site

All Senate members and staff who are on the legislative complex more than three days a week are 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 will be open Monday through Friday between 8:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. There will be 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> and see the attached COVID-19 Testing Site Protocols.

Vaccination Policy and COVID-19 Screening App

All members and employees of the Maryland General Assembly, including those working remotely, are required to be vaccinated or 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 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. Instructions on how to download and use the app are attached. If you or your staff is having difficulty with the app, please contact the Office of Information Systems at 410-946-5300. All members and staff should download and install the app as soon as possible to ensure its proper operation ahead of the start of the 2022 Session.

Masking Policy

All members and staff must 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 and staff 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.

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.

Senate Floor Schedule

The Senate of Maryland will convene in person and may be on the floor five days a week. 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.

Public Access

Senate Chamber

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

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

The Senate will be 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

As noted above, all individuals entering the Miller and James Buildings will have to wear face masks to gain entry to the buildings and continue to do so consistently throughout any public area of the buildings, including committee rooms.

Audience seating in committee rooms will not be open to the public until February 14th, except for press. Beginning on February 14th, seating in the committee rooms will be available 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.

Member and Committee Offices

Although the Senate office buildings will be 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 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.

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.

Page Program

This year, our Page Program will have an optional in-person component. The 2022 MGA Virtual Page Program “Re-loaded” will be a virtual version of the traditional program. The 2022 program, however, has an optional in-person component. The optional day visit will allow pages to tour the State House complex and experience serving in-person on the Senate Chamber floor. As a result, we will have a limited number of pages available on Wednesdays and Thursdays. All participating pages will be required to show proof of vaccination to participate in-person.

Committee Protocols

Committee Hearings and Briefings

Based on the most up-to-date public health information, all Senate committee hearings and briefings will be held virtually through February 11th. Beginning on February 14th, committee hearings and briefings will be held in person.

Most committees will hold bill hearings on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. The number of witnesses who may testify on a bill will not be limited as it was during the 2021 Session. Committee chairs will determine witness guidelines such as witness testimony length and late testimony. Please note that if a committee accepts late written testimony, only paper copies may be submitted (no electronic submission). Late sign-up for oral testimony will be at the discretion of committee chairs.

As always, committee guidelines will be available on the MGA website on each committee page at the beginning of session. Due to the logistical challenge of appropriately streaming in-person and Zoom testimony simultaneously, we will not be allowing hybrid testimony for bill hearings.

Witness Sign-up

As was required during the 2021 Session, all witnesses, including sponsor witnesses, must create a “MyMGA” account and sign up to testify through the MGA website.

Until February 11th, witness sign up will be two (2) business days in advance of a scheduled bill hearing and will be open from 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. All selected witnesses will receive the Zoom log-in information the night before the hearing. Please note that witnesses cannot designate someone else to take their slot.

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 you are a sponsor witness, you should indicate that you are providing written testimony only and should not sign up as providing oral 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 be scheduled at the discretion of the committee chairs. Members will participate in voting sessions in person from committee rooms. 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 schedule within one business day after a voting session.

Until February 11th, voting sessions will be streamed on the MGA website. Beginning February 14th, members of the public will have access to voting sessions.

Public Bill Files

The public can 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 host virtual events until February 14th.** In addition, hosts should 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.