



Senate of Maryland:
2021 Session
Operations Plan

Background

- Since June 2020, Senator Ferguson and the President's office staff have been meeting with DLS operations teams, DGS staff, other Senators, health professionals, and infectious disease specialists to design a path forward for the 2021 session.
- In August 2020, the Senate contracted with Dr. Lucy Wilson of UMBC to provide expert health advice on the risk levels of various reopening plans and to advise on safety operations in all Senate facilities and the State House.
- The following plan represents an overview of operations being proposed. Some of the plans included will require temporary changes to the Senate Rules, ongoing monitoring policies, and guidelines for changes to operations based on increased data about the pandemic.
- From the outset, the core values underlying this work have attempted to balance the critical importance of the legislative branch for the continuity of government with the very real risks associated with COVID-19. By primarily following the advice of health experts, this plan presents the lowest possible risk levels for operations feasible for necessary legislative functions.

Expert Consultation – COVID Protocols

- **Dr. Lucy Wilson, UMBC**

- Dr. Lucy Wilson, a professor in the Emergency Health Services department in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at UMBC, is an infectious disease transmission expert whose research is helping governors and the public respond to COVID-19. For more than a decade, Wilson has served as a public health expert on disease response and public health planning at the international, national, and state levels.



Expert Consultation – Air Flow

- **Green Street Environmental/William Montley, CHMM, CIE**
 - Bill Montley received a B.S. in Architecture from The Catholic University of America and is a Certified Hazardous Materials Manager, Master Level and a Certified Indoor Environmentalist. Bill is considered a regional expert on issues surrounding mold evaluations and remediation. His practice focuses on industrial hygiene services for public and private property owners and managers, including mold, indoor air quality, radon, asbestos, and hazardous and regulated materials.



Stakeholder Input



- Stakeholder Meetings
 - Members of the Senate
 - Business Groups including the Chamber of Commerce
 - Common Cause
 - League of Women Voters
 - Local Government – Anne Arundel County Health Officials
 - Maryland Association of Counties
 - Maryland Association of Nonprofits
 - Maryland Government Relations Association Leadership
 - MD/DC Press Association
 - Numerous Executive Agencies – DGS, DMH
 - Organized Labor including the AFL-CIO
 - Variety of advocacy groups and lobbyists

Senate COVID Advisory Workgroup

- Advisory Workgroup members will include:
 - President Pro Tem
 - Majority Leader
 - Majority Whip
 - Minority Leader
 - Minority Whip
- Regardless of precautions we take to limit risk, the dynamic nature of this virus and the non-traditional process for Session inevitably will create situations that we have not anticipated.
- Leading up to and during the 2021 Session, an advisory workgroup will assess circumstances and make recommendations to the Senate President for implementation.

Overall Facility Plans

- **Daily Access** - Only Senators, two approved staffers per office (selected by Senator with President approval), and Press will have daily access to the facilities.
 - Interns (unless one of the approved staffers) - remote only
 - Senator Contractual employees (unless one of the approved staffers) - remote only
 - Guests – only permitted in Stage 3, must be escorted while in Senate building
- **Daily Health Check App** - All people entering campus buildings will need to go through a Health Questionnaire regarding COVID risk status.
- **Telework** - As much as possible, staff will be encouraged to telework. DLS is in preparation for telework for all employees who can.
- **Social Distancing & Face Covering Requirements** - Face coverings will be required in the complex in all public spaces, and social distancing will be required wherever feasible; members and staff will be encouraged to avoid interacting in-person as much as possible.

MGA Daily Health Check App

User Information Log Out

Update Your Information

Badge Number

First Name

Last Name

Building

Floor

Room Number

? ✓ 🕒 👤
Questions Status History User

Screening Questions

Have you had a positive test for COVID-19 infection within the past ten (10) days?
 Yes No

Have you been within six(6) feet for longer than 15 minutes with someone who has suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection?
 Yes No

In the last seven (7) days have you had a cough (either new, or different than your usual cough), shortness of breath, or difficulty breathing?
 Yes No

In the last seven (7) days have you had a fever (either subjective, or measured) or chills?
 Yes No

In the last seven (7) days have you had a sore throat?
 Yes No

In the last seven (7) days have you had unusual muscle pain or unusual headache?
 Yes No

In the last seven (7) days have you had new loss

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Questions Status History User

Approval Status

NAME
DATE

BADGE NUMBER

? ✓ 🕒 👤
Questions Status History User

Overall Precautions & Proactive Steps

- **Testing - Required:**
 - Members & Select Staff – twice a week (Mondays & Thursdays)
 - Other Staff – once per week
 - On-Demand – rapid tests will be available daily on-demand for individuals
- **MGA Contact Response Teams:**
 - The Senate will have a dedicated contact response team.
 - We will work over the next two months to make sure these tracers are familiar with the Senate facilities and operations in order to have specific knowledge should we have a positive test or exposed individual.
- **Air Flow Sanitizing:**
 - Green Street Environmental has provided expert recommendations for aerosol transmission.
 - We will be deploying enhanced air filters, continuous air circulation protocols, and portable air filters on the Senate floor and in Senate committee rooms.
- **Disinfecting Plans:**
 - We are working with DGS to ensure that specific disinfecting plans are in place (1) on a daily basis for buildings overall, (2) on a frequent basis for high-touch areas, and (3) as needed basis for operations on the Senate floor & committee rooms.

MGA Staged Operations

Stage 3	<i>Full Senate Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debate & voting conducted on Senate floor • Members may choose to participate in floor proceedings from committee room, only voting not debate
	<i>Policy Committee Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Hearings</i>: members participate virtually from Senate Offices • <i>Voting</i>: in-person in committee room
	<i>Other Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Office Meetings</i>: limited to maximum of two (2) visitors, must be escorted into and out of Senate Office Buildings • Regular public access restricted to Legislators, Staff, and Press
Stage 2	<i>Full Senate Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debate & Voting conducted from committee rooms virtually • Unavailable members marked "excused"
	<i>Policy Committee Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Hearings</i>: members in Senate Offices • <i>Voting</i>: in-person in committee room
	<i>Other Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Campus limited to Legislators, staff, and press; no in-person office meetings
Stage 1	<i>Full Senate Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debate & voting paused
	<i>Policy Committee Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Hearings</i>: virtual • <i>Voting</i>: select voting, as necessary
	<i>Other Operations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extremely limited for duration of Stage 1

Stage Checkpoints

- Stage 3 - No activity, isolated, or low level disease activity with limited exposure
- Stage 2 Conditions - Low level disease activity with documented exposures requiring quarantine
- Stage 1 Conditions - Increase activity or multiple instances of disease activity and potential transmission; pandemic conditions

Senate Floor Precautions

- Chamber time will be limited by Rule to two hours at a time, with flexibility for debate.
- The Chamber will be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized, and the public will not be permitted entrance.
- Senators will be required to wear face coverings, and staff will be limited to core staff on floor.
- Plexiglass barriers will be erected between each desk.
- Desks are being spaced as distantly as possible.
- Increased HVAC protocols to maximize outdoor airflow into chamber, and air purifiers will be placed in the Chamber.
- Press will be allowed to attend in the gallery in limited numbers.



Committee Room Precautions

- Members of the Public will be allowed to virtually testify via Zoom.
- Plexiglass barriers will be placed between all member desks, and Senators are projected to be at least 4.5 feet apart.
- Air Purifiers will be placed in each committee room.
- Desks and committee rooms will be cleaned and sanitized between meetings.

Committee Witnesses - Overall

- *Default Senate Bill Hearings:* Bill Sponsor, four (4) Favorable witnesses, two (2) Favorable with Amendment witnesses, and four (4) unfavorable witnesses.
 - Chairs, after consulting with the Ranking Republican on the committee, will have the discretion to increase the number of witnesses on select bills when a bill is assigned a hearing date.
- *Expanded Senate Bill Hearings:* Bill Sponsor, eight (8) favorable witnesses, four (4) Favorable with Amendments, and eight (8) unfavorable witnesses.
- With the exception for “lead proponent,” all witnesses will be provided with 2.5 minutes to testify.
- No time limit on questions from committee members to witnesses.

Favorable/Sponsor Witnesses

- Within 48 hours before a witness signup opens, the sponsor will notify the committee of the three (3) Favorable witnesses of their choosing:
 - One Witness shall be designated as the “Lead Proponent”
 - The Sponsor shall have unlimited introduction time.
 - Lead Proponent shall be limited to five minutes.
 - Remaining favorable witnesses shall be limited to 2.5 minutes.
- The last Favorable slot shall be opened up to the public, for a *randomly-selected* witness.
- If the Sponsor does not notify the committee of witness signup within 48 hours of witness signup opening, the slots will be open to the public in a randomized selection.
- The Chair will retain the ability to adjust order and make other adjustments necessary to ensure the issue receives a proper hearing (for instance, Departments who elect to testify).

FWA/Unfavorable Witnesses

- Favorable with Amendments: two (2) slots will be provided.
 - One slot shall be selected at random, while the other shall be selected at the discretion of the Chair.
- Similar to the Favorable slots, the Unfavorable witnesses will also be provided with four (4) witness slots.
 - Up to two of these slots will be “organizational” slots, and the Chairs shall use their discretion to ensure that organizations who most accurately reflect groups opposed are provided with a randomized opportunity to testify.
 - The other two opposition slots will be randomly selected by those who sign up.
- The Chair will retain the ability to adjust order and make other adjustments necessary to ensure the issue receives a proper hearing.

Public Access & Transparency

- As has been planned for the 2021 Session, every floor session will be streamed by video.
- All committee sessions *and voting sessions* will be streamed by video as well, with as much public notice as is feasible as to the timing of voting sessions, and the voting lists.
- Senators will be encouraged to set up time for constituent meetings online to continue to make sure the public's voice is heard in this process.
- Credentialed Press will continue to have access to public spaces in the complex, and will be required to follow the same face covering, and other health practices as outlined above.

Scheduling Considerations

- It is highly likely the Senate will not convene daily, especially for the first third of Session.
- Floor sessions will be scheduled with notice to all Senators.
- On days without floor session, committees will be urged to start hearings earlier in the day.
- On days without floor sessions, a block of time may be reserved so Senators can meet with constituents virtually or in person.

Additional Procurements

- The Senate is procuring the following items to ensure safe operations:
 - Custom plexiglass shields for Senate floor and committee rooms.
 - New Senate floor chairs to provide additional space on floor.
 - Air Purifiers for Senate Chambers and committee rooms.
 - Contractual employee to sanitize chamber and committee rooms.
 - Voting tablets for each committee room.
 - DLS has already purchased and continues to purchase additional PPE.
- OIS is continually increasing bandwidth capacity.
- We are working with DGS & DORS to ensure that Senate canteen has both the expanded personnel to deal with increased demand.
 - We are also working on a “delivery” option for the Senate canteen to further reduce contact.

DLS/MGA Leave Policies

- Emergency Paid Sick Leave will remain available to employees who are impacted by COVID-19 because of a mandated quarantine or isolation, or if caring for an individual impacted by COVID-19.
- Advanced Sick Leave policy, which allows employees to use sick leave in advance, though they will still have to repay it, will also remain in effect.

Additional Considerations

- Procedural Changes will need to be considered including:
 - More lax Excused Absence policy;
 - Recognize flexibility with Senate floor scheduling;
 - Steps to limit paper and natural interactions;
 - Make certain the Legislative branch maintains the flexibility to determine our timeline for Session; and
 - Rules to require appropriate face coverings and other needs.
- We will continue to encourage Senators to use hotel and housing accommodations and have conversations concerning their safety protocols.