

# **2022 Senate of Maryland COVID-19 Rules**

## Plain Language Version

These are rules the Senate will follow during the 2022 legislative session. They will help keep the senators, staff, and visitors safe while COVID-19 is still a concern. These rules are based on the latest information about COVID-19. They could change.

### **COVID-19 Shots and Testing Rules**

All senators and people who work for the Maryland General Assembly must have their COVID-19 shots or get tested every week.

### **Masks Rules**

Senators, people who work for the Maryland General Assembly, and visitors must wear face masks in the committee rooms and public areas of the Senate Office Building and the Maryland State House.

The Senate Office Building is where the Senate committees meet. It is also where the senators have their offices. The Maryland State House is the building where the senators meet as a whole group. It is where they discuss and vote on new laws recommended by the committees.

### **Visiting Senators in their Offices**

Senators may not have more than 4 people who are not staff or other senators in their offices at the same time. Senators are allowed to make other rules like: only meeting with people who have appointments, only meeting virtually (by phone or online), or only meeting with people who have had their COVID-19 shots.

### **Maryland State House**

The room where the Senate meets in the Maryland State House is called the Senate Chamber. The senators come together in person when they meet in the Senate Chamber. The Senate usually meets:

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

There is an area in the Senate Chamber where people can watch the Senate work. It is called the “gallery.” Some seats in the gallery will be blocked off so everyone keeps a safe distance from each other. Once the gallery is full, no one else can get a seat.

### **Committee Hearings and Briefings**

- **Briefings** are when a committee meets to get more information about an issue. The committee invites people to speak at briefings. This might be people from state agencies. Sometimes a committee invites experts from outside of state government or people affected by an issue.
- **Bills** are new laws the committees consider passing.
- **Bill hearings** are when the committees meet to listen to people “testify” about bills.
- **Testifying on a bill** means telling the committee if you are for or against a bill and why. "Oral testimony" is when you talk to a committee. "Written testimony" is when you write down what you think and give it to a committee to read. People who testify are called “witnesses.”

### **Committee Rules**

- Most committees will have their hearings on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.
- All Senate hearings and briefings will be held “virtually” through **February 11th**. This means committees will meet online. Visitors will not be allowed in the committee rooms, but they can watch online.
- Starting on **February 14th**, all Senate committee hearings and briefings will be held in person. Some seats will be blocked off so everyone keeps a safe distance from each other. Once a committee room is full, no one else can get a seat. If there is not enough room for everyone in the room, staff will try to make sure witnesses have seats while the bill they are testifying on is being discussed.
- There will not be a limit on the number of people who can testify on each bill.
- The chairperson of each committee will make rules for witnesses. Examples are: how long people can testify, whether people can sign up late to testify, and whether people can turn in written testimony late. To read the rules for each committee, go to the

Maryland General Assembly (MGA) website at [mgaleg.maryland.gov](http://mgaleg.maryland.gov). Then click on the “Committees” tab.

### **Witness Sign-Up**

Hearing schedules for each committee are on the [MGA calendar](#). They are posted at least a week before the hearing.

If you want to testify on a bill, you must sign-up. To do that, you set up an account at [MyMGA Tracking](#). To learn more, watch this [video](#). You also need a MyMGA account to send in written testimony.

#### **Until February 11th:**

- Witness sign-up will start on the MGA website 48 hours before the bill hearing.
- Witnesses can sign up from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m.
- Witnesses can sign up on:
  - Thursdays for Monday hearings.
  - Fridays for Tuesday hearings.
- Witnesses testify using Zoom. The night before the hearing, you will receive a Zoom link to the hearing. If a bill hearing is scheduled for a Monday, the Zoom link is sent on Friday.

#### **Starting on February 14th**

- Witness sign-up will start on the MGA website the day before the hearing at 4:00 p.m. Witnesses can sign up anytime from then until 10:00 a.m. the next day.

Witnesses cannot let someone else testify in their place.

Committees hear testimony on different bills each time they meet. The morning of the hearing, you can look on the [MGA calendar](#) to see what order the bills will be discussed.

### **Voting Sessions**

Voting sessions are meetings where the committees discuss and vote on bills. Senators will meet in person. Whenever possible, information about when voting sessions will take place and

a list of the bills that a committee will vote on will be posted on the MGA website. This will happen 24 hours before the voting session.

Until February 11th, you can watch the voting sessions on the MGA website. Starting February 14th, you can watch the voting sessions in person.

### **Bill Files**

Bill files include the bill, written testimony, and other information related to the bill.

- After a committee votes “yes” on a bill, it goes to the full Senate for discussion and possible changes. This is called “second reading.” That is when the bill file will be on the MGA website.
- If a committee votes “no” on a bill, it will not go to the full Senate. If that happens, you can get the bill file on the website after the legislative session ends in April.
- If you can’t find the bill file on the website, you can ask for the bill file after the bill hearing. To ask for a bill file, call or email the committee staff. Contact information for each committee is on the website under the “Committees” tab.

#### **Want more Information?**

Go to the Maryland General Assembly website: [mgaleg.maryland.gov](http://mgaleg.maryland.gov),

Go to the Maryland General Assembly website: [dls.maryland.gov](http://dls.maryland.gov), or

Call 410-946-5400