

ADRIENNE A. JONES
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

10th Legislative District
Baltimore County



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The Maryland House of Delegates

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401-1991

November 5, 2020

Dear Members:

I want to thank you for your patience and perseverance during this interim. I know that this has been a difficult time for each of you, your constituents and your communities. I am hopeful that Maryland will continue to stay ahead of the curve on managing the COVID-19 pandemic.

My staff and I have spent the interim meeting with public health officials and experts in the infectious disease field; other state legislative leaders from across the country; contractors who specialize in air flow and surface cleaning; operations teams on Capitol Hill; advocacy and community groups; and House members from both parties to craft a plan for the 2021 legislative session.

The main goal of this plan to allow all of us to execute our constitutional responsibilities to the fullest extent possible, in the safest way possible, for the full 90 days of the regular session.

The pandemic is a constantly evolving situation and I want to assure you that we have contingency plans in place should the trends get better or worse. However, based on what we know now, we will move forward with a hybrid plan for the legislative session, as detailed below.

FLOOR SESSION: Since the House is the largest legislative body that operates in the State of Maryland, we have had to make a few changes to our process to protect the health of members and staff while ensuring that each of you has the ability to fully participate on behalf of your constituents. Some of these changes are by policy and some will require adoption of a new House rule that we will circulate to the members ahead of Opening Day.

To adhere to public health guidance:

- **Meetings as One Body:** The House will meet simultaneously in two locations on campus that will act as one legislative body. We have made accommodations for 70 members to sit in Rooms 170-180 in the House Office Building as the “Chamber Annex,” at assigned, socially-distanced desks. The proceedings will be livestreamed, in real-time, into 170-180, and each member sitting in the Chamber Annex will be able to vote, offer amendments and debate legislation real-time as well. Delegates will be required to wear

face coverings, and staff will be limited to core staff on floor. Delegates in the Chamber will also be assigned new seats, at an appropriate distance from one another. We will determine what members are in which space by a lottery system.

- **Frequent Breaks:** We will not meet for more than two hours at a time without a break, to allow for the Chamber and the Chamber Annex to be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized and to give members a break.
- **Extra Precautions for any immuno-compromised members:** While we believe that all of the precautions enumerated in this memo will keep members and staff as safe as possible during the legislative session, I understand that some of you may have unique circumstances due to being in a higher risk category. Our public health experts have advised that we make accommodations for any of you who have additional healthcare needs to have the option of participating from the gallery facing me. We have wired the gallery for Wi Fi and power and can equip you to vote from the gallery, however, we cannot accommodate you to be able to debate legislation, due to limitations on A/V wiring. If you want to be seated in the gallery, recognizing the A/V limitations, please contact Alex Hughes in my office.
- **Transparency:** All House proceedings will be livestreamed. I know some of you were concerned about the problems with the livestream last year, as was I. OIS has worked throughout the interim with our vendors to ensure that these problems do not persist in 2021. Additionally, the press will be permitted in limited numbers in the gallery above me, socially distanced, and, in the Chamber Annex.
- **Air Flow:** Increased HVAC protocols to maximize fresh airflow into chamber have been implemented, and the windows above the Tiffany glass ceiling have been opened. Additionally, air purifiers have been placed in the Chamber
- **Limited people on the floor:** For the 2021 legislative session, we will only permit members and essential staff in the Chamber and Chamber Annex.

Additionally, under changes to the House Rules for this extraordinary circumstance, we will:

- Allow for bill introduction and the exchange of messages between the House and the Senate and the Governor with a limited number of members from both parties in attendance. You will still need to submit your blue back to the Clerk's office in person to introduce your bill.
- Move the Bill Request Guarantee deadline up to January 19th and the Hopper deadline up to close of business on February 5th to be able to better manage work flow.
- Sponsor only bill introduction, to avoid unnecessarily passing blue backs around to multiple members.

As a result of these changes, after Opening Day, I do not anticipate that we will be on the floor daily for the first third of session. I also do not anticipate that we will be on the floor on Monday nights until March. We will consolidate the work schedule of the House to minimize the number of people who need to be on campus each day.

COMMITTEE WORK: House Committees will operate virtually this year, with bill hearings beginning on the second day of session. Each of your Chairs will get in touch with you in the coming weeks as to the anticipated work schedule for each committee, however, everyone should be prepared for bill hearings to start in earnest on January 14th. You can participate in

hearings from your home or your Annapolis office, should you choose, but you must remain on camera while you are participating in committee hearings. *You should prioritize your legislation this year and get bills in early to provide more time for the possibility of passage.*

- **Hearing Schedule:** All committees will provide at least 48-hour member and public notice as to which bills will be heard during which time slot on which day via the MGA website.
- **Online Testimony Submission:** OIS has designed a system to allow the public to upload written testimony. Members of the relevant committee will be able to access the written testimony for each bill through their floor system.
- **Online Bill File Availability:** The testimony file for each bill will be posted on the MGA website after a bill is voted out of the relevant standing committee. Any bill file not up on the website by Sine Die will be publicly released after session.
- **Online Sign Up:** OIS has designed an online testimony sign up system through the MGA website. Each Committee Chair will provide time slots per bill for members of the public to sign up the day before the bill is scheduled to be heard.
- **Subcommittee meetings:** While subcommittees do not fall under the Open Meetings Act, all subcommittee meetings will be livestreamed through the MGA website.
- **Voting Sessions:** All voting sessions will be livestreamed through the MGA website.

LEGISLATIVE CAMPUS

- **State House:** We are working with the Governor and the State House Trust to keep the State House closed to the public for the legislative session to prevent large crowds from congregating inside. Construction on Lawyer's Mall will be completed by January, so outdoor rallies will still be permitted if socially distanced and masked, based on City of Annapolis guidelines.
- **House Office Building:** While we are discouraging in-person meetings for public health reasons, we recognize that such meetings may occasionally need to occur. We will allow access to the public and other non-legislative officials by appointment only, to avoid unnecessary crowding in hallways. Any meeting guests will have to be escorted to and from the main entrance to the House Office Building and your office.
- **District Nights, Legislative Receptions and Committee Dinners:** All such events are cancelled for in-person participation for the 2021 session.
- **Member Availability:** We have worked with OIS to add a section on each member's webpage to list office hours and best way to contact each member (by Zoom, by appointment etc.) on your webpage on the MGA website. I encourage each of you to set specific times that members of the public can schedule to meet with you.
- **Senate Canteen:** We are working with DGS to have expanded hours and food runners available for the Senate Canteen so that each of you have access to food without having to leave campus.

HEALTH & SAFETY

- **Face Coverings:** Masks will be required on the legislative complex and on the floor of both the Chamber and Chamber Annex for the 2021 legislative session, including during legislative debate. The Anne Arundel County Health Department has also offered to have

member's properly fitted for N-95 masks, in the event you want to purchase and use this type of mask. You can contact my office for assistance.

- **Testing:** The Senate President and I have worked with the Department of Health and Department of General Services to stand up a testing tent five days a week in the B Lot adjacent to the House Office Building. Both rapid tests and PCR tests will be available to members and staff who are on campus.
- **Health Challenge App:** OIS has designed an app that all members and staff will be required to use to gain entry to the building each day. This app can be downloaded on your phone (instructions will follow in an email) to allow Capitol Police and State Police to see that you have answered the health challenge questions for the day for COVID-19 risk status to allow building entry. These include the standard questions regarding your temperature and overall health.
- **Cleaning:** DGS is cleaning all high-touch surfaces and restrooms in the House Office Building three times per day in the common areas and we have hired additional cleaning staff to supplement these services. We also have specific disinfecting plans in place on a daily basis for all buildings and the Chamber and Chamber Annex in particular, as well as on an as-needed basis for other operations.
- **Air Flow:** We have worked with DGS to ensure that the HVAC systems are operating with maximum fresh air flow, as well as top quality filters for air purification. We have purchased air purifiers, based on the square footage, for the Chamber and Chamber Annex to add an additional layer of protection. Additionally, we have authorized the purchase of one air purifier for use in your Annapolis office out of your budget.
- **Hand Sanitizer:** There are hand sanitizer stations throughout the House Office Building and State House in high traffic areas, including elevators.
- **PPE Supplies:** The Senate President and I have authorized members to pay for PPE (masks and gloves) in reasonable quantities for your use and your staff's use out of your member budgets.
- **Contact Response Team:** In the event of a positive case of COVID-19, we have hired a small team to work out of the Human Resources Office to provide rapid outreach to any member or staff that may have come in to contact with that positive case.

STAFFING: In general, the Senate President and I are encouraging everyone to telework to the extent possible. OIS has enabled every member to use Google Voice to roll your phones over to a different number off campus. The fewer people that we have on campus, the less likely we are to create a higher risk of COVID-19 spread, in the event that we have any positive cases.

- **Member's Staff:** All members will be required to file a staffing plan with Human Resources, identifying: (1) what staff member, if any, will be working on campus, (2) their cellphone number and (3) what days and hours they will be working on campus. If you are in shared office space and you feel that you absolutely must have your staff person on campus, we will work with you to determine the safest way to have your staff operate.
 - **Session secretaries:** Since the work flow of session will be more remote this year, please consider carefully whether you will need a session secretary and, if so, please strongly consider accommodations for them to work remotely.

- **Interns and pages:** The General Assembly will continue to operate both of these programs virtually. Contact Carol Pelli if you are interested in a virtual intern or Tawanna Offer if you're interested in supporting the virtual page program.
- **DLS:** We have asked Vicki Gruber to pare down on-campus staff to the extent possible in order to minimize the number of people on campus. As a result, please email or call the staffer you need to reach instead of walking over to their office.
- **Speaker's Office and Minority Office:** Speaker's and Minority staff will be available and on campus daily.

LODGING

- **Booking Accommodations:** While the full House will not be meeting daily, especially in the beginning of session, we will allow members to book whatever lodging they deem necessary in Annapolis for their own safety and work schedule. I would encourage those of you that do not need to be in Annapolis every day to not stay in Annapolis to the extent possible.
- **Tax Exempt Status:** Members can book rooms on a daily basis without having to pay the lodging tax out of pocket, based on advice from the Attorney General. Please be sure to use your tax exempt card at the time of booking.

Again, thank you for your patience during this interim. If you have any questions, please contact Alex Hughes in my office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adrienne A. Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping flourish at the end.

Adrienne A. Jones
Speaker