



The Florida House of Representatives

Office of the Speaker

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Florida House of Representatives
From: Chris Sprowls, Speaker
Date: December 18, 2020
Re: COVID-19 Protocols for January & February 2021 Committee Weeks

Several weeks ago, we advised you that the House would address the impact of COVID-19 on our legislative work in phases. Speaker Pro Tempore Avila was tasked to work with staff in the development of the protocols for our next phase. Our goal has been to tailor our protocols to match the specific circumstances of the moment. I am pleased to share with you an outline of Phase II of our safety protocols, which will apply to the January and February committee weeks.

Any changes to the public health guidelines that result from the progress of the vaccination efforts will be considered in the development of protocols for Phase III. In late February, we will share our protocols for the regular legislative session that begins on March 2, 2021.

The House will implement a number of measures to mitigate the risk of exposure to COVID-19 for Members, employees, and visitors when we convene at the Capitol for the upcoming committee weeks. As a reminder, the scheduled committee weeks are:

- Week of January 11, 2021
- Week of January 25, 2021
- Week of February 1, 2021
- Week of February 8, 2021
- Week of February 15, 2021

The schedule for the first committee week will be published later today. Subsequent committee week schedules will be published during the preceding week.

Please be advised that Members diagnosed with COVID-19, who are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms or who are in quarantine must email HouseSpeaker'sOffice@myfloridahouse.gov to request to be excused from committee meetings.

Protocol #1: Alternating Schedule / Shorter Committee Week

The intensity of activity in and around committee weeks creates challenges for guarding against the spread of the novel coronavirus. The House will mitigate that risk by splitting our committee blocks in two and implementing an alternating meeting schedule, which will result in a more condensed committee schedule by reducing the number of days Members will need to be in Tallahassee.

During the January 11 committee week, half the committees and subcommittees will meet over two days (rather than all the committees meeting over the traditional four days). During the January 25 committee week, the remaining committees and subcommittees will meet for two days. For the week of February 1, the committees and subcommittees that met during the January 11 committee week will meet again, and so on through February.

Protocol #2: Room Sanitation

We will have one hour breaks between committee meetings to clean and disinfect the meeting rooms, and replace microphone shields. Medical grade HEPA filters will be running in all committee rooms.

Protocol #3: Smart Space Management

The House will limit committee meetings to Webster Hall, Morris Hall, Reed Hall and Sumner Hall. All committee meetings will be live-streamed on <https://thefloridachannel.org/>.

Audience seating in committee rooms will be socially distanced and limited to meetings where committees are discussing bills or potential legislation. The House will use an online registration system for the public (including lobbyists and advocates) wishing to provide substantive testimony and for the press. Seating will be available on a first-come, first-served basis. There will also be an opportunity for the public to provide written testimony to committee members should they not be able to provide testimony in person. On certain issues of great public significance and when scheduling allows, we will also have expanded seating capacity for on-site virtual testimony. More details will be available on the House website the week of January 4.

When feasible, agency and expert presentations in committee will be carried out by video conference. Staff will be strictly limited to only those individuals essential to the operation of the meeting.

Protocol #4: Responsible Access to House Spaces

Visitors, including lobbyists, are required to observe social distancing and wear a face covering when in the company of another person. Visitors exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, who are in quarantine, or who were recently diagnosed with COVID-19 may not enter House spaces and should reschedule their visit to a different time.

Members and House employees are encouraged to use conference calls or virtual meetings as alternatives to in-person meetings. If in-person meetings are necessary, every effort should be made to limit the maximum number of guests who can safely socially distance. As reference, standard Member offices generally accommodate two (2) guests, and standard employee offices generally accommodate no more than one (1) guest. In-person meetings should be by appointment only with sufficient time in between appointments to avoid crowding in common areas.

Consistent with the protocols that are currently in place, the House will not be offering Chamber tours or reservation of any House spaces to the general public in January or February.

Congregation in House seating areas or open spaces is prohibited.

Protocol #5: Precautions for Members

No Member of the House wishes to put themselves, their colleagues or our staff at risk. Therefore we are asking that you take full advantage of the available safety precautions.

The same COVID-19 molecular diagnostic testing offered during the Organization Session will be available on site to Members and legislative employees. Members and district legislative assistants should plan to arrive to Tallahassee the day before their first commitment at the Capitol to allow for testing and delivery of results. A negative COVID-19 test from the on-site testing service will be a prerequisite for access to House spaces. Testing information will be emailed on Tuesday, January 5, 2021.

We would also ask you to wear a mask when around other Members, legislative employees, and visitors. Some exceptions may apply based on individual circumstances.

Protocol #6: Precautions for Staff

District legislative assistants are authorized to travel to Tallahassee for the January and February committee weeks and will be the only staff approved to work in each Member's Capitol office. Members are not authorized to hire OPS staff or to recruit volunteers to share the space with their district legislative assistant in their Capitol office.

District legislative assistants diagnosed with COVID-19, who are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms or who are in quarantine are not authorized to travel to Tallahassee. District staff must return to their district immediately if they are not cleared with a negative COVID-19 diagnostic test from our on-site testing service.

Public-facing desks in committees and administrative offices will be retrofitted with plexiglass. Members may request to have their district legislative assistant's desk in the Capitol retrofitted with plexiglass by emailing COVIDQuestions@myfloridahouse.gov.

All House employees will be required to wear a mask when interacting with others in the legislative process as well as undergo testing at the on-site testing center.

We appreciate the challenges presented by COVID-19, but are confident that if we work together in a spirit of openness and consideration, we can navigate the challenges of the next few weeks.

Please email HouseSpeaker'sOffice@myfloridahouse.gov with your questions regarding the committee process or COVIDQuestions@myfloridahouse.gov for questions regarding COVID-19.

We hope you and your loved ones have a safe and joyful holiday season.