



April 7th, 2021

Dear President Cortez and Speaker Schexnayder:

During the public health crisis caused by COVID-19, you faced the difficult task of developing safety protocols for legislative sessions in 2020. We applaud the steps you took during an unprecedented time, including mandatory masking, spaced seating, temperature checks and the inclusion of electronic testimony.

While the option to provide written testimony was an important change, this option was not uniformly adopted by each committee, and many submitted comments were never read aloud. Moreover, written statements are no substitute for verbal witness testimony that offers members of the Legislature the chance to ask questions and receive real-time feedback from their constituents as they consider legislation.

According to a recent [Associated Press survey](#), Louisiana is among eight states (13 legislative chambers) that do not allow people outside the Capitol to testify remotely via phone or video during committee hearings.

As you look ahead to the 2021 Regular Session, we hope you will take additional steps to protect health and safety, foster public confidence in government and assure a more transparent legislative process that permits ample and meaningful public input:

- Establish a clear, uniform, and equitable process for members of the public to testify in committee via phone or video. This process should not differentiate between public and invited testimony in protocols for virtual presentations; ensure that members of the public appearing on their own initiative and people invited to testify have equal opportunities to speak virtually before committees.
- Provide information on changes made to the Legislature's rules, protocols and proceedings - including the time and manner in which those changes will be implemented - to the public in a clearly identified and easily accessible location on the Legislature's website.
- Make all committee business, including deliberations and votes, accessible to the public in a timely fashion.
- In the event audio or video coverage of a proceeding or meeting is interrupted, require the Committee Chair or other presiding official to suspend discussion until audio/video is restored.
- Require each committee to recognize electronically submitted written testimony during the committee meeting. Where possible, written testimony should be read into the record. At a minimum, the author, organization affiliation and position of each written statement should be read into the record.

- Require that all hearings that will be available for virtual attendance and participation utilize the closed captioning functions available in most online meeting software, in order to accommodate Louisianans who are deaf or hard of hearing.

We appreciate your consideration and look forward to working with you during a safe, transparent, participatory, and robust legislative session. For further information or to discuss these requests in detail, please contact Davante Lewis, Director of Public Affairs and Outreach, Louisiana Budget Project at davante@labudget.org.

Sincerely,

Louisiana Budget Project
Louisiana Policy Institute for Children
March of Dimes
Agenda for Children
ACLU of Louisiana
Louisiana Fair Housing Action Center
Louisiana Community Health Worker Outreach Network
The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society
Workplace Justice Project at Loyola Law Clinic
Justice & Accountability Center of Louisiana
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network
Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families
United Way of Southeast Louisiana
Power Coalition for Equity and Justice
Allen Council on Aging
Louisiana Progress
National Birth Equity Collaborative
504HealthNet, Inc.
League of Women Voters of Louisiana
VOTE- NOLA
Louisiana Public Health Institute
Louisiana Primary Care Association
Southern Poverty Law Center Action Fund
American Lung Association
MoBB United for Social Change
Independent Women's Organization
Progressive Social Network
Odyssey House Louisiana