

January 14, 2021

Dear Speaker Cupp and President Huffman,

We, the undersigned organizations and individuals, understand that our democracy works best when all of us are involved and when all of us have equitable access to it. With a keen understanding of just how much impact the actions of the Ohio General Assembly have on Ohioans, the issues we care about and the communities where we live, we want to ensure that engaging with the legislature is indeed safe and accessible for all who wish to do so.

Given, however, that we are in the midst of an ongoing public health crisis with COVID-19, participating in person at the Ohio Statehouse is not a safe or accessible option for many Ohioans - despite their sincere interest in doing so through the committee process. Many Ohioans have a valid concern about the safety of attending legislative hearings in person, but they still want to participate in legislative deliberations that impact their lives.

This concern is particularly notable among those who are disparately impacted and whose communities have been harmed by the Coronavirus, especially including Ohioans who are Black, immunocompromised, and who have low-incomes. The pandemic has also placed a strain upon parents and caregivers who are shouldering additional care for their children, elders, and family members amidst remote schooling, lack of childcare, and limited in-home caregiving options. Ohioans balancing these increased demands of caregiving and family responsibilities can be met with insurmountable obstacles in having their voices heard at the Statehouse because they cannot partake in person. Additionally, the health and wellbeing of legislative and Statehouse staff and members of the press corps are at risk when there is an increase in the number of people with whom they come into contact at the Statehouse.

We, therefore, believe it is imperative to create ways for Ohioans to participate in the legislative process while staying healthy and safe. To that end, we request that the Ohio legislature require that every person within the Statehouse wear a mask and that the legislature provide opportunities for constituents to virtually provide oral testimony during committee hearings.

At the beginning of the 133rd General Assembly, the Ohio legislature made an important step in making the legislative process more transparent by live-streaming all of its committee hearings to the Ohio Channel. The next logical step is to make this access to the legislative process interactive to allow witnesses who wish to testify to the committees using the same sort of tool. Fortunately, in a number of ways, the legislature is already utilizing technology to meet with constituents virtually. For example, the Ohio House 2020 Economic Recovery Task Force and the Controlling Board have hosted hearings where virtual testimony was available for witnesses, illustrating that this technology is not only already available but also facilitates participation in legislative discussions. Additionally,

legislators in both the House and Senate have been meeting with constituents and continuing their community engagement virtually over the past several months.

In order to ensure that the legislative process remains accessible to all Ohioans even beyond the end of this session, we are also committed to have legislation that codifies the ability of Ohioans to provide virtual testimony into law so that future General Assemblies can benefit from greater participation from constituents who may be otherwise unable to participate in the legislative process. Doing so would ensure that Ohioans - those who are farmers, factory workers, healthcare professionals, teachers, children services workers, parents of school-aged children, people with disabilities, and other constituent groups - would all be able to more accessibly contribute to committee hearings.

Thank you for your consideration in ensuring that the Ohio legislative process is as accessible as possible for all Ohioans. We look forward to working with you on additional ways to improve and to expand transparency during the 134th General Assembly.

Sincerely,

A. Phillip Randolph Institute of Ohio
Advocates for Ohio's Future
American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio
All On The Line - Ohio
All Voting is Local
Audubon Great Lakes
Bold New Democracy
Council on American Islamic Relations - Ohio
Case Western Reserve University
Ceres
Children's Defense Fund-Ohio
Choice Network
Cincinnati Indivisible Rapid Response Team
Common Cause Ohio
Communications Workers of America, District 4
Community of Reason
Disability Rights Ohio
Equality Ohio
Faith In Public Life
Get the Vote Out
Human Rights Campaign
If/When/How: Lawyering for Reproductive Justice at the Ohio State University Moritz College of Law

Indivisible
Innovation Ohio
Dr. Gregory Lam
League of Women Voters of Ohio
Mobilize the Vote 2020
Moms Clean Air Force in Ohio
Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America
NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio
National Association of Social Workers - Ohio Chapter
National Council of Jewish Women Cleveland
National Council of Jewish Women, Columbus
National Organization for Women, Ohio
Natural Resources Defense Council
New Voices for Reproductive Justice
Office of the Ohio Public Defender
Ohio Alliance for Retired Americans Educational Fund
Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence- OAESV
Ohio AFL-CIO
Ohio Association of Foodbanks
Ohio Citizen Action
Ohio Consumers for Health Coverage
Ohio Council of Churches
Ohio Domestic Violence Network
Ohio Education Association
Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund
Ohio Federation of Teachers
Ohio Immigrant Alliance
Ohio Justice & Policy Center
Ohio National Organization for Women
Ohio Organizing Collaborative
Ohio Poverty Law Center
Ohio Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Ohio Student Association
Ohio Voter Rights Coalition
Ohio Women's Alliance
Ohio Women's Public Policy Network
Ohioans to Stop Executions
Ohioans for Gun Safety
OPAWL - Building AAPI Feminist Leadership in Ohio
Our Revolution Ohio

Physicians Action Network
PL+US: Paid Leave for the US
Planned Parenthood Advocates of Ohio
Policy Matters Ohio
Preterm
Rep Your Block Ohio
River Valley Organizing
Sierra Club
Thrive at Llife: Working Solutions
UnHarming Ohio
Unitarian Universalist Justice Ohio
URGE: Unite for Reproductive and Gender Equity
Women Have Options - Ohio