



THE FLORIDA SENATE
SENATOR WILTON SIMPSON
President

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Senators
All Senate Professional Staff

FROM: Wilton Simpson

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Protocols for 2021 Interim Committee Weeks

DATE: December 18, 2020

In recent days, we have all been encouraged with positive reports surrounding new COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics. However, until a vaccine is widely available for those outside of high risk designation, the Senate will continue to proceed with care and caution, observing social distancing guidelines and limiting in-person meetings. To that end, I would like to share the protocols the Senate will utilize during the 2021 Interim Committee Weeks.

Committee Blocks

As we have previously discussed, you will notice that committee blocks have been reduced so no more than three committees are meeting at one time. This schedule will allow us to utilize the committee rooms with the largest seating area for Senators, 412 Knott, 110 SB, and 37 SB, to accommodate appropriate social distancing.

Required Testing

The Senate will utilize the same COVID-19 testing procedure for interim committee weeks that we had for the Organization Session. Senators and all Senate Professional Staff, as well as district staff based in or traveling to Tallahassee will test prior to each interim committee week. You will receive an email during the week of January 4 with information on testing time slots for the week of January 11. The mobile testing unit will be parked in the same location outside the Knott Building.

Remote Committee Viewing/Public Testimony

Input from various stakeholders and members of the public is critical to the legislative process, and the Senate will work diligently to ensure Floridians have access to their elected officials as we consider important legislation for our state. The Senate worked in partnership with Florida State University to reserve three remote viewing rooms at the Leon County Civic Center, which will provide the opportunity to for members of the public to view meetings and virtually address Senate committees in a safe, socially distant manner.

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Each committee notice published in the Senate calendar will include the room number within the Civic Center where members of the public may gather should they wish to address the committee. As always, additional public comment can be offered in writing and for inclusion in the committee packet.

Committee Viewing

In-person committee viewing will be limited to those invited to present information before the committee as well as members of the media. As determined by the Committee Chair, in advance of each meeting, committee staff will contact those with subject matter expertise (for example, agency staff), who would typically attend a committee meeting within their jurisdiction, to determine whether, based on the specific agenda, they should attend the meeting in person in order to answer questions that may arise.

Virtual Meetings

For the month of January, Senators are asked to avoid in person meetings and to utilize available platforms to schedule meetings virtually. Likewise, when feasible, committees are asked to facilitate remote presentations. Senators and staff who require assistance in facilitating remote meetings or committee meeting presentations should contact Senate IT. We will monitor the status of the COVID-19 Pandemic and adjust this policy as appropriate for our February Committee Weeks.

As a reminder, I asked the Secretary of the Senate and Senate Administration to temporarily postpone bringing on board any Senate pages, Senate interns, or Senate volunteers for work at the Capitol during the 2021 Regular Session.

Schedule of Meetings for the Week of January 11, 2021

The weekly schedule of Senate meeting time allocations for our first interim committee week, January 11-15, 2021 is attached for your reference and planning. The first interim calendar will be published on January 4, 2020.

Chair and Vice Chair Briefing/Closed Security Briefing

On Monday, January 11 at 1:00 p.m., Senator Passidomo will host a procedural briefing for Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs. At 1:45 p.m. Sergeant Kelly will host a closed security briefing, which all Senators are encouraged to attend.

I understand that these protocols represent a significant change for everyone, and there are sure to be bumps in the road as we navigate the best way to facilitate a safe environment for the 2021 Legislative Session. Thank you for your patience and understanding, and I look forward to seeing you all in January.