



Arizona Legislative Democrats
1700 West Washington
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

January 11, 2022

Dear Speaker Bowers and President Fann,

We understand from recent media reports that the decisions announced last week regarding COVID-19 protocols in the House and Senate have not yet been finalized. As you discuss the final arrangements, we urge you to re-implement safety measures that will protect both members and the public and allow for all voices to be heard at the capitol.

As you know, Rep. Athena Salman and Sen. Juan Mendez are expecting their first child any day. They should not be expected to come down to the capitol and risk their health and the health of their newborn, especially when the technology to allow remote participation has already been used effectively and easily in both the House and the Senate. Participating from the safety of their home is the only responsible option. While the risks remain so high, to deny that narrow and reasonable request would silence the voices of their constituents who elected them to be their advocates in Phoenix.

What will happen when a member must isolate or quarantine due to COVID-19 exposure or infection? Are they expected to show up the Capitol and vote from their offices? That would endanger not only the other members but also the staff who work in the building every day. The only sensible response is to allow members to fully participate from their homes. We should also not create an incentive for members concerned about the progress of their bills to hide a positive diagnosis in order to keep working.

The same is true for the public. Your policy of barring the public from participating remotely will lead to infected individuals coming into our buildings and mingling with both staff and members because they feel like they cannot adequately do their jobs and bring the voices of their clients or organizations to the state capital.

And what about agency directors and other elected officials who would like to testify about the bills they need for their agency or jurisdiction? And what about the rural and tribal residents who may not be able to travel for hours to come the capitol but whose perspective is so important to our policy discussions? We have the technology to bring their voices into our hearing rooms. We hope we aren't lacking the political will to do so.

Finally, we are concerned about members and potential visitors who are medically vulnerable and face serious complications if they were to contract COVID-19. We know of members who are undergoing treatment for cancer, who are diabetic, and who are asthmatic. For example, Senator Alston recently tested positive for COVID-19 and she is currently undergoing treatment for cancer. On the advice of her physician, she is remaining in isolation until January 21st. Accordingly, because there is no policy that allows remote participation, Senator Alston is being forced to miss both next week's Joint Appropriations Committee and the Senate Appropriations Committee Agency Budget hearing. Senator Alston and other medically vulnerable members should not be forced to come into the building in order to participate in committee or on the floor.

While everyone is tired of the pandemic and wants to get back to the way things used to be, the reality is that we're not there yet. Arizona – and indeed the whole country – is in the middle of a new surge of COVID-19 cases. We can't let our guard down. None of us wanted to be in a situation where we must continue to wear masks and social distance, but that's what we must do in order to stay healthy, and it's the only way to be responsible for the most vulnerable among us, especially young children who can't be vaccinated. Technology makes it much easier to get through this pandemic. We urge you to once again allow remote participation from home for both members and the public.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Rios
Senate Democratic Leader
District 27



Reginald Bolding
House Democratic Leader
District 27