

December 22, 2020

The Honorable Dan Patrick, Lieutenant Governor of Texas
The Honorable Dennis Bonnen, Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives
The Honorable Dade Phelan, Texas House of Representatives
Members of the Texas Legislature

Dear Lt. Gov. Patrick, Speaker Bonnen, Rep. Phelan, and Members of the Legislature,

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we ask that the Texas Legislature ensure that there are virtual, safe and accessible methods for the public to participate in the legislative process—particularly for the public to offer committee testimony—during the upcoming 87th Legislative Session.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to devastate Texas families, we know that it is both dangerous and irresponsible to expect members of the public to come to Austin and participate in-person at the Texas Capitol.

Many Texans are eager to participate in the legislative process, given the enormous impact that policymaking has on their lives. However, immunocompromised, Black and brown Texans, and the elderly members of our communities, as well as those who care for vulnerable people, are all at an increased risk if they were to try to participate in-person at the Capitol. Additionally, Capitol workers, legislative staff and legislators are also being put at risk if they are exposed to hundreds or thousands of people throughout the session.

We are asking you to create a safe and virtual process for people to offer committee testimony, safely from home. Our State Board of Education, local governments across Texas, and state legislatures across the country have tackled this and developed accessible methods of offering telephone, video or written virtual testimony.¹ Creating a safe way for Texans to offer committee testimony remotely is within the capacity of the Legislature.

If members of the Legislature value safety and public health, as well as having input from Texans in the legislative process, then you must create virtual methods for Texans to participate in the policymaking process.

Thank you for your work in ensuring that all Texans have the opportunity to participate in our legislative process at such a critical time.

Sincerely,

¹ See National Conference of State Legislatures, COVID-19 State Actions Related to Legislative Operations, (“Beginning in March 2020, one or both chambers in at least 28 states, the District of Columbia, Guam and the Virgin Islands adopted or enacted measures to allow for remote participation or voting, or proxy voting, by members in floor sessions or committee meetings.”)
<https://www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures/covid-19-state-actions-related-to-legislative-operations.aspx>

ACLU of Texas
All On The Line
Austin HIV Planning Council
The Afiya Center
Clean Elections Texas
Common Ground for Texans
Deeds Not Words
Fair Maps Coalition
Fund Texas Choice
Human Rights Campaign
Human Rights Initiative of North Texas
Jane's Due Process
League of Women Voters of El Paso
Lilith Fund for Reproductive Equity
NARAL Pro-Choice Texas
National Council of Jewish Women
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice
Planned Parenthood Texas Votes
Progress Texas
Temple Emanu-El Dallas
Texas AFL-CIO
Texas Civil Rights Project
Texas Equal Access Fund
Texas Freedom Network
Texans Against Gerrymandering
Transgender Education Network of Texas
TRUST Coalition
URGE: Unite for Reproductive & Gender Equity
Whole Woman's Health
Whole Woman's Health Alliance
Workers Defense Project