

Guidance for Committee Chairs Hosting Public Hearings Utilizing the Zoom Webinar Platform

Updated January 11, 2021

During the First Regular Session of the 130th Legislature, public hearings will be conducted electronically using the Zoom webinar platform. It is intended that electronic public hearings will function in a similar manner to in-person public hearings by allowing electronic access to those who wish to testify. Below are some tips and information to consider when conducting electronic public hearings.

Zoom webinar platform: how it works and how to access

The Zoom webinar platform allows committee chairs to control when persons can appear and speak by video (or telephone) at a public hearing by dividing all participants into 2 categories:

- **Panelists** (committee members, clerk, analyst and person currently testifying).
Panelists can be seen (unless offering testimony by phone) and can speak during the hearing.

Each committee member will be sent a “panelist” invitation to the Zoom webinar by the clerk. Members must be reminded not to share this invitation with anyone, even other Legislators. It is important to note that panelists can view the attendee list on Zoom and access the chat feature (whereas, attendees cannot). Chairs should establish clear guidelines, such as limiting the use of the Zoom chat feature for requesting technical assistance or requesting to be recognized (if the primary method for hand-raising is not working). The chat feature should not be used for substantive conversations.

- **Attendees** (all other persons not currently testifying).
Attendees can watch and listen to the hearing but cannot speak, cannot be seen, cannot view the lists of panelists and attendees on Zoom and cannot access the Zoom chat feature.

Accessing the hearing

The public hearing advertisement in the newspaper and the e-mail hearing notice sent to the Interested Parties’ list will include a link to the electronic form for signing up to testify. All individuals who wish to testify must register in advance of the public hearing in order to be called upon to testify. Each individual who registers to testify using video will be sent an “attendee” invitation to the Zoom webinar by email. Those testifying by phone will use the Zoom toll-free number associated with that meeting.

Sponsors and co-sponsors will automatically be sent “attendee” invitations to the Zoom webinar by the committee clerk.

Calling on attendees to testify

Prior to a hearing, the chairs (as well as the clerk and analyst) will be provided a list of the people who registered to testify. This list will be sorted by the LDs scheduled to be heard on that day and will indicate how a registrant will testify: in favor/in opposition/neither-for-nor against. Chairs will use the list to call on those who registered to testify by scrolling through the alphabetical list of attendees on the who have signed on to the Zoom webinar public hearing. At that time, the person set to testify will be promoted from “attendee” to “panelist” enabling that person to speak using audio and to appear by video (or simply to speak if connected using a telephone). After the person’s testimony is complete, they will be returned to “attendee” and the next person can be called to testify.

YouTube livestream/recording of virtual public hearings

Any person who wishes to simply observe the public hearing may watch a livestream of the hearing on the committee's YouTube channel. Every committee meeting streamed over YouTube is recorded and may be watched any time after the hearing. A link to the committee's YouTube channel appears on the committee's page on the Legislature's website and will be included in all public hearing newspaper notices and all email hearing notices sent to the committee's Interested Parties' list.

Submission of written testimony and other materials

Any individual, including a sponsor, co-sponsor or other Legislator, who wishes to submit written testimony or other materials on a LD should be strongly encouraged to use the Legislature's online testimony submission portal for that purpose **prior** to the public hearing. Testimony that is not submitted using the portal, may not be available to committee members in time for the hearing.

Chairs are strongly encouraged to prohibit use of the screen share function during a public hearing.

Responsibilities and roles during a virtual public hearing

The committee chairs and clerk should decide in advance of each hearing who will be responsible for each of the following tasks. The chairs may also choose to delegate one or more of these tasks to a committee member(s) and should ensure that a backup plan is in place in the event an individual assigned a task has to step away from the hearing or encounters a technology issue.

- Calling each person to testify using the lists of sponsors, co-sponsors and registrants.
- Promoting each person testifying from attendee to panelist and back to attendee when done.
- Monitoring a time clock for testimony, if used.
- Recognizing committee members who wish to ask questions of the person testifying or otherwise.
- Monitoring the Zoom chat feature.
- Monitoring and muting/disabling video/removing persons from Zoom, as deemed necessary by the chairs. This role is most appropriately taken on by a chair or another committee member as backup if necessary (not staff).

Helpful tips for a successful virtual public hearing

Chairs may find it helpful at the outset of each public hearing to remind all members and attendees:

- To please be patient as we work out the issues with this new meeting format;
- That their testimony is being broadcast live and recorded on YouTube;
- For persons testifying, to ensure the name they are using on the Zoom webinar matches the name they used when signing up to testify;
- For persons testifying, to help the committee manage the attendee list by leaving the Zoom webinar when finished testifying and to watch the rest of the hearing on YouTube;
- That written testimony can be submitted at any time (even after the public hearing) using the online testimony submission portal; and
- For committee members, to mute their microphones when not speaking.

In advance of a committee's first public hearing, the chairs, after consultation with the clerk and analyst, should decide:

- How committee members will signal that they want to ask a question or speak? Options include using the “raise hand” feature on Zoom, waving a “real” hand on their video or asking to speak using the Zoom chat feature;
- What communications will be allowed using the Zoom chat feature? Chairs should not allow the Zoom chat feature to be used for substantive discussions and should remind members to refrain from doing so;
- How will the analyst, clerk and chairs communicate during the meeting? Use of Microsoft Teams chat function is recommended; and
- How can sponsors disseminate proposed amendments to the committee during the hearing? If shared in advance of the hearing, should they be posted on the committee webpage?

Transitioning to a work session

If the committee wishes to vote a bill on the same day as the hearing, it may transition to a work session while the committee remains in attendance on the Zoom webinar. Chairs should consider who, other than committee members, might be needed to participate in the work session. Individuals needed for the work session other than members should be contacted by the clerk via email with a request to join or re-join the Zoom webinar as attendees, to be promoted to panelists when appropriate. Because it will take some time for this invite process to be completed and for those individuals to join or re-join the Zoom webinar, chairs should consider pausing the meeting before starting the work session or postponing the work session until all public hearings that day have been completed.

Prior to the work session, chairs should review the handout “Guidance for Committee Chairs Hosting Work Sessions Utilizing the Zoom Meetings Platform,” recognizing that this work session will be conducted using the Zoom Webinar Platform and not the Zoom meeting format that will be employed for most work sessions. Chairs should communicate clearly to all committee members in attendance as well as the clerk and the analyst how the work session will proceed, including how voting will be conducted if a vote is expected.

Technical issues: who to contact

During a public hearing using the Zoom webinar platform, technical issues are likely to arise from time to time. In order to make these hearings as seamless as possible, the committee clerk should be the first line of contact regarding technical issues. The committee clerk will be participating in the public hearing remotely through Zoom. Some issues may be evident to all participants. In these instances, the committee clerk will be aware of the issue and may be able to address it as it arises, or will need to contact the Legislative Information Technology office for further assistance. If an individual member is experiencing a technical issue, that member should contact the committee clerk privately using the chat function. The committee clerk will either assist that member or contact the Legislative Information Technology office for further assistance.

The committee analyst should not be relied upon during a public hearing to deal with any technical issues. The role of the analyst during a public hearing is to take notes regarding testimony, especially regarding committee members’ requests for further information, and to make notes of suggested amendments to the legislative proposal being heard.