



Date: February 15, 2022

TO: The Honorable Brian P. Kemp, Governor
The Honorable Geoff Duncan, Lieutenant Governor
The Honorable David Ralston, Speaker of the House
The Honorable James Beverly, House Minority Leader

FROM: The Undersigned Coalition of Organizations

SUBJECT: Adoption of Guidelines for Government Transparency

Governor Kemp, Lt. Gov. Duncan, Speaker Ralston, and House Minority Leader Beverly:

We, the undersigned organizations, urge you to adopt guidelines for government transparency during an ever-evolving global health crisis. As the COVID-19 health crisis continues to reshape how we live and work, alters education for millions of children and disrupts our economy, it has become even more clear that there is valuable work that has been done and lots more to be done. Although these are challenging times, we cannot allow the times to shred our democratic values. We must continue our commitment to working together to ensure that both equitable access and transparency are at the forefront. Last April, the undersigned organizations [sent a letter to](#) Governor Kemp, Lt. Governor Duncan, Speaker of the House Ralston, members of the Georgia State Senate, and members of the Georgia House of Representatives urging the amendment of the Open Meetings Act because transparency was and still is a major concern for all Georgians. The Georgia General Assembly is a public body and conducts the business of the Georgia public. Georgians have the right to witness the open conduct of their business by the General Assembly.

As you know, many Georgians are taking the necessary measures to protect themselves and guard the welfare of their communities. This requires a continuous commitment and an evolving approach in regard to the COVID-19 outbreak. We commend Speaker of the House Ralston for the newly implemented House Legislative [COVID policies](#). Several are particularly beneficial; and we urge the Senate to adopt COVID policies including similar provisions:

- Members must be tested prior to the Legislative session; must report any positive results; and must monitor their health daily. Members experiencing specified symptoms should not attend sessions until cleared by a doctor.
- Masks must be worn by Members and House staff when in the House Chamber and Gallery. The Speaker of the House has the authority to remove from the House Chamber and House Gallery any individual, Member or otherwise, who refuses to comply with the mask requirement. Masks shall comply with House Rules 1.4 and 1.9..
- Committee meetings will continue to be live-streamed, and members will continue to be able to access those live-streams from their offices. House Media Services will also live-stream House sub-committee meetings, provided that such meetings take place in meeting rooms with streaming technology in place. House Media Services will continue to provide support for conducting committee meetings over Zoom.
- Committee chairs will allow active remote participation (including voting) by Members in committee meetings via Zoom in rooms that have the capability.

Because *all* Georgians should be able to participate in the legislative process, we also recommend that *both* the House and the Senate implement these additional practices:

- Adhere to roll call for administrative rules of the legislature.
- The creation of an online portal for the public to use to upload testimony, comments, and other written documents for committees.
- Extending time frames for public comment to at least 48 hours, so that *all* Georgians – not just lobbyists – have a fair opportunity to have our voices heard.
- Require at least 24 hours' public notice of committee meetings, to give the public an opportunity to learn about the meetings *before* they are held.
- Committee votes should be recorded so that Georgians can have specific information about what our legislators are doing and what choices they make.
- Fiscal notes should accompany bills, particularly those bills noted as budgetary fixes.
- Recording of the voting record for committee hearings.

We strongly believe that, even during the current public health crisis, our elected officials must ensure that *all* the people of Georgia can exercise our right to participate in open and accountable government proceedings.

Let's work together to make Georgia a leader in government transparency and a great example for other states to follow.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We, the undersigned organizations, urge you to make these recommended changes to safeguard the public's ability to participate as you do "the people's business" in our state.

Onward,

- 1.Common Cause Georgia
- 2.Asian-Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta
- 3.Black Voters Matter
- 4.Fair Districts GA
- 5.GALEO Latino Community Development Fund/GALEO Impact Fund
- 6.Georgia AFL-CIO
- 7.Georgia Conservation Voters
- 8.Georgia Muslim Voter Project
- 9.GeorgiaWAND
- 10.Indivisible Georgia Coalition
- 11.National Democratic Redistricting Committee
- 12.New Georgia Project Action Fund

13.Poder Latinx

14.Rep GA Institution Inc.

15.SPARK Reproductive Justice NOW!

16.Women Engaged

17.Women Watch Afrika