

2024 House of Delegates Protocol Guidelines

Plain Language Version

These are the rules the House of Delegates will follow during the 2024 legislative session.

House of Delegates Office Building

The House of Delegates Office Building is where the House of Delegates committees meet. It is also where the delegates have their offices.

- All committee work in House of Delegates Office Building will be done in a “hybrid” format. This means committees will meet in person in committee rooms, and witnesses can sign up to testify in person or online. The rules for how this will work are below.
- There will not be any big meetings or other get-togethers in the House Office Building.

Maryland State House

The Maryland State House is the building where the delegates meet as a whole group. It is where they discuss and vote on new laws recommended by the House committees. The room they meet in is called the House of Delegates Chamber. The delegates come together in person when they meet in the House of Delegates Chamber.

- There is an area upstairs in the House of Delegates Chamber where people can watch the House of Delegates work. It is called the “gallery.” There are not a lot of seats, so not everyone can get one. Once the gallery is full, no one else can get a seat.
- Delegates, staff, and visitors in the House Chamber and gallery are not required to wear a mask. Masks will be available if you want to wear one.

2024 House Committee Rules

All House committee work will be done in hybrid format for the 2024 legislative session. That means you can testify in person OR online. These rules could change.

Hearings

Bills are new laws the committees consider passing.

Bill hearings are when the committees meet to listen to people “testify” about bills.

Testifying on a bill means telling the committee if you are for or against a bill and why. People who testify are called “witnesses.”

You can watch bill hearings online in real time or after the hearing has taken place. Go to the Maryland General Assembly (MGA) website at mgaleg.maryland.gov to watch.

Bill hearings will begin on January 12, 2023.

- Pre-filed bills are bills delegates turn in before the legislative session starts. These bills are first in line to get hearings.
- Bills and committee information can be found on the MGA website.
- The hearing schedule is online in early January 2023. It changes, so check often.
- Starting at 10:00 am on Wednesday, January 10, 2024, you can sign-up to testify on bills that have a hearing on January 12. Sign-up on the MGA website.
- Every House bill submitted by 5:00 pm on Thursday, February 8th will get a hearing. House bills submitted after this date go to the House Rules Committee. They may or may not get a hearing.
- The committee chairs decide how long the hearings will last.
- Hearing schedules for each committee are on the MGA website. They are posted before the hearing.

Witness Sign-Up

If you want to testify on a bill, you must sign-up online. You may testify in person OR online.

- **Witness sign-up will be opened on the MGA website 48 hours before the bill hearing.**

The 48 hours does not include the weekends.

- Witnesses can sign up from 10am until 6pm.
- Witnesses can sign for:

Wednesday's hearings on Monday

Thursday's hearings on Tuesday

Friday's hearings on Wednesday

Monday's hearings on Thursday

Tuesday's hearings on Friday

- Committees hear testimony on different bills each time they meet. **If you have signed up to testify online, you will receive a Zoom link to the hearing the day before the hearing. You can look on the MGA website to see what order the bills will be talked about.** If a bill hearing is scheduled for a Monday, the Zoom link is sent and the hearing order is posted on Friday.
- Committees may limit the number of people that can testify on a bill.
- Some committees may not allow you to testify on a bill if it is the same as a bill from the 2023 Session. They may not allow you to testify if it is a Senate bill from the 2024 Session and it is the same as a House bill that was already heard by the committee.
- If you want to testify with other witnesses, you have to come to the Committee room to testify on the day of the hearing. **If you signed up to testify online, you have to testify online. The way you testify cannot change.**

Subcommittees

Subcommittees are smaller committees that focus on specific issues. They report to the committees. Usually, you can watch the subcommittees work by going to the MGA website.

Subcommittees mostly meet online. The subcommittee of the House Appropriations committee will meet in person. You can still watch online.

Voting Sessions

Voting sessions are meetings where the committees discuss and vote on bills. You can watch committee voting sessions on the MGA website. A list of the bills that a committee will vote on is posted on the website one or two days before the voting session.

Maryland State House

When all the delegates come together, they meet in the House of Delegates Chamber. This is also called the “House Floor.” The House Floor is where delegates talk about, change, and vote on bills.

- When delegates on a committee want a bill to become law, they vote “yes.” When most delegates on a committee vote “yes,” the bill then goes to all of the other delegates to talk about it together. This is called “second reading.” Second reading is when a bill is talked about and may be changed. If changes are made, they are called “amendments.”
- After “second reading,” the bill goes to “third reading.” Third reading is when delegates vote on a bill. When most delegates vote “yes,” the bill passes.
- If the bill being discussed on the House Floor is a Senate bill, the delegates can also make changes to it. This is called a “floor amendment.”

Bill Files

Bill files include the bill, written testimony, and other information related to the bill.

- After a committee votes “yes” on a bill, it goes to the House Floor for second reading. That is when the bill file will be available on the MGA website.
- If a committee votes “no” on a bill, it will not go to the House Floor. If that happens, you can get the bill file on the website after the legislative session ends in April.
- If you can’t find the bill file on the website, you can ask for the bill file after the bill hearing. To ask for a bill file, call or email the committee staff. Contact information for each committee is on the website under the “Committees” tab.

Want more Information?

Go to the Maryland General Assembly website: mgaleg.maryland.gov

Or, go to the Department of Legislative Services website: dls.maryland.gov

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