



**National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society**

**Ohio House of Representatives – Government Oversight Committee
Written Testimony -Holly Pendell
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National MS Society**

On behalf of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society (the Society) I write regarding the pandemic's impact on citizen access to the Ohio Legislature and Committee Meetings and in support of HB 55. People with disabilities, both seen and unseen, have historically faced challenges in accessing legislators at the Ohio Statehouse; however, walking aids, elevators, ramps and other physical accommodations have helped make the statehouse accessible and safe to most. Unfortunately, the threat of COVID-19 creates additional hurdles to citizens' safe access to lawmaking.

As a result of COVID-19 and current risks to personal health, the Society urges this committee to pass House Bill 55 to allow remote video testimony by citizens. This would reduce potential COVID-19 exposure at the Statehouse as well as ensure and improve citizen access to testify in committees and participate in government at this crucial time.

While current evidence suggests that simply having MS does not increase the risk of dying from COVID-19, the possible long-term consequences of having MS may make people more susceptible to having a severe case of COVID-19. The risk of having to go to hospital for COVID-19 rises with age, progressive forms of MS, and higher levels of disability. Throughout the pandemic, people living with MS are finding ways to adapt and lead productive lives. They have found ways to communicate with others and participate in events from the safety of their homes. However, individuals living with MS face serious limits to their ability to provide in person testimony at the Ohio Statehouse. While it is true that written testimony can be submitted, nothing can replace the opportunity to be seen and heard within the process of lawmaking.

Finally, we request simplification of the process to testify before both chambers. Currently, the system of identifying and then contacting staff for each committee and submitting a pdf version of a testimony slip imposes an additional burden on those with limitations such as disabilities and for those who lack extensive knowledge of each chamber. Like the current contact forms available to contact a legislator, we propose a standardized form to register online to testify before committees.

We urge you to protect citizen access to the lawmaking process regardless of age, disability, and health status. Should you have any questions or concerns, we would be happy to discuss them. Please feel free to contact Holly Pendell at holly.pendell@nmss.org.