

Chairman Wilkin, Vice Chair White, and Ranking Member Sweeney,

My name is Molly Shack, and I am co-executive director of the Ohio Organizing Collaborative, a statewide grassroots advocacy organization. As a long-time community organizer working with community leaders across Ohio, it's imperative for members of our organization to be able to testify safely during a pandemic.

As Ohioans, we know our democracy works best when all of us can participate. No matter our race, income, or where we live, our voices deserve to be heard by our lawmakers.

In the midst of an ongoing pandemic, participating in person at the Ohio Statehouse is not a safe or accessible option for many of us. We have a legitimate concern about the safety of attending hearings in person, but we still want to participate in the important political deliberations that impact our lives, without putting our health and safety at risk.

Whether we want to fix the school funding formula, fight for better child care, improve Ohio's unemployment system or demand bail reform, we cannot effectively participate in our democracy without the option of virtual testimony. Ohioans are already struggling with the increased demands of living, working, and taking care of their families during a pandemic. COVID-19 has disproportionately harmed our communities, most of whom are Black, brown, immunocompromised and low-income. The pandemic has also hurt parents and caregivers who have become even more burdened while caring for their loved ones due to a lack of government support and resources.

It's critical for the legislature to create safe and effective ways for Ohioans to participate in the democratic process in the middle of a life-threatening pandemic. The health of legislative and Statehouse staffers, as well as members of the press corps, is also at risk if there is unnecessary, increased contact with the public at the Statehouse.

To that end, we request that the legislature require that every person within the Statehouse wear a mask. We also request the legislature provide opportunities for constituents to virtually provide oral testimony during committee hearings.

Public accessibility to the statehouse should also be of utmost priority, as it gives Ohioans the opportunity to fully participate in the legislative process, whether they live in Toledo, Athens, or Cincinnati.

At the beginning of the 133rd General Assembly, the Ohio legislature made an important step in making the legislative process more transparent by live-streaming all of its committee hearings to the Ohio Channel. The next logical step is to make this access to the legislative process interactive to allow witnesses who wish to testify to the committees using the same sort of tool. Fortunately, in a number of ways, the legislature is already utilizing technology to meet with constituents virtually. For example, the Ohio House 2020 Economic Recovery Task Force and the Controlling Board have hosted hearings where virtual testimony was available for witnesses,

illustrating that this technology is not only already available but also facilitates participation in legislative discussions. Additionally, legislators in both the House and Senate have been virtually meeting with their constituents over the past several months.

In order to ensure that the legislative process remains accessible to all Ohioans, we are also committed to have legislation that codifies the ability of Ohioans to provide virtual testimony into law. Doing so would ensure that Ohioans throughout the state - farmers, factory workers, healthcare professionals, teachers, child care workers, parents of school-aged children, people with disabilities, and other constituent groups - can all contribute to committee hearings.

Thank you for your consideration in ensuring that the Ohio legislative process is as safe and accessible as possible for all of us.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Molly Shack". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.