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# Legislature Moves to Recommence In-Person Hearings After Year of Virtual Testimony

Government / **Published On June 09, 2021 05:23 PM /**

Staff Consortium **June 09, 2021**

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**Earl B. Ottley Legislature in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas. By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM.**

The 34th Legislature announced Wednesday that it will transition back to in-person hearings after a year of virtual testimony caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, with the first in-person testifiers being Governor Albert Bryan's FY 2022 budget proposal testifiers last week during the budget overview process.

“As we continue to manage the Covid-19 pandemic, our transition back to in-person testimony will continue in the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall, Capitol Building, St. Thomas,” said Senate President Donna Frett-Gregory, whose office issued the release announcing the change. “We have

been working vigorously as a Body since this pandemic has impacted life as we know it. The Legislature continued to do the work of the people and has conducted many meetings utilizing various virtual platforms.

She added, "This effort has proven to work, but it has had its challenges; however, the Earle B. Ottley Legislative Hall is now outfitted with plexiglass dividers for Senators and testifiers to ensure CDC compliance."

According to the release, Ms. Frett-Gregory further indicated that ongoing preparations are being made in the St. Croix district and will be ready for in-person testimony by June 10, 2021. As the doors are opened, efforts will continue in monitoring the fluid nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and modify the requirements as needed, Ms. Frett-Gregory said.

However, specific guidelines will be required of all in-person testifiers:

- Testifiers must remain in the outside waiting area or their vehicles until their block for testimony is required.
- Only four testifiers will be admitted into the well; other testifiers must remain in the gallery during their block of testimony.
- Testifiers will not be permitted to remain in the Chambers after their block of testimony.
- Testifiers are asked to arrive 30 minutes before their scheduled appearance time to complete an electronic check-in process.
- Check-in using a guest QR code from their smartphone. This includes entering identifying information and answering COVID-19 exposure questions.
- Upon entry, in-person testifiers will be required to provide their vaccination record or COVID-19 negative test.
- Vaccination records will only be accepted two or more weeks following the second vaccine.
- COVID-19 negative test results must be taken no more than 72 hours before the testimony.
- Wearing of masks unless seated in the well.
- Sanitization of hands and complete temperature screening.
- Complete a full security check, including all bags.

According to the release, legislative custodians will sanitize the testifier bench and outside waiting area after each measure/block. These steps are being taken to adhere to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines and to ensure the safety of everyone in attendance. However, the Legislative buildings remain closed to the public in general, and we are asking for the continued cooperation as we move towards the new normal.

"We must be mindful that vaccinations, as advised by the CDC, are strongly encouraged for employees, vendors, and the public to stop the spread of Covid-19," concluded Ms. Frett-Gregory.