



STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Office of the Speaker
107 North Main Street
Concord, NH 03301-4988

Sherman A. Packard
Acting Speaker of the House

February 12, 2021

Hon. Renny Cushing
House Democratic Leader
State House Room 307
Concord, NH 03301

Sent via Email

Leader Cushing,

Thank you for your continued dialogue on remote session participation. Your staff and Rep. Ebel have been helpful in bringing information to our attention with regard to processes and technology being used in other states.

We continue to research if a reasonable remote solution exists that will meet the unique logistical and security requirements of our 400 member House of Representatives. A solution that would meet our unique needs has not yet been identified.

While I acknowledge that several legislative bodies in other states and our own state senate have found methods that work for them, I'm sure you will agree with me that a solution suitable for our body will be of far greater complexity. Additionally, developing a set of rules and parameters that would be acceptable to the body for remote participation of their peers could be equally challenging.

Regarding the House session on the 24th and 25th, I want to assure you and your caucus that we will have health and safety documentation outlining precautions and protocols. This administration, like the previous administration, has and will take all reasonable measures to mitigate risk at these sessions.

Members, under any circumstances, must make decisions about their own health situations, and assess their own levels of risk. This was the case before the pandemic and is heightened as a result of the current pandemic.

I wanted to address the three requests included in your February 9th in detail.

I believe it is impractical to permit remote participation to all members who request it. States who have successfully done so have memberships of less than half of ours, and most have provided state issued equipment to those members to facilitate it. Deployment of equipment, testing, training of members, technical support protocols, and backend software development would all be tremendously time consuming and costly.

Remote participation may be possible for future sessions for members with specific health issues. As I indicated earlier in this letter, we are continuing to search for solutions that will meet our unique needs as a body, but will not compromise the operation of the House. Identifying our specific needs for a solution, then identifying the proper vendor to facilitate the solution, training our staff on how to use it, testing the technology, procuring devices to support the technology, deploying the technology and devices to members, training members, analyzing members' data connectivity, developing support protocols and analog backups, would all need to be done prior to using any system. These important steps are necessary.

The facility will permit us to make reasonable accommodations for members who request it. The facility is ADA accessible. Significant distancing and enhanced health and safety protocols will be in place. We believe we are creating the safest possible environment for members and staff. We will be working with Dr. Ballard of DHHS and our first responder partners to develop our plans and documentation. Site visits with Dr. Ballard and others have not been completed. We will be sure to keep you and your caucus members informed as details come together. Details will be published in the next House calendar, but if they are available sooner, I will let you know.

Lastly, I would like to encourage continued good faith dialogue without the constant threat of litigation. I have an obligation to defend the institution and ensure its ability to conduct its business. You have an obligation to communicate the position of your caucus. We can operate with this mutual understanding and without costly litigation. It is in the best interests of our state to do so.

Best Wishes,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Sherman Packard". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Sherman Packard
Speaker of the House