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**President,**  
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**To:** Honorable Members of the City Council, Staff, and members of the public  
**From:** Matt Stegman, Director of Fiscal & Legislative Services  
**RE:** City Council Hearing Policies and Procedures

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## **I. ATTENDANCE & PROFESSIONALISM**

**ATTENDANCE:** Councilmembers are expected to virtually attend all council meetings, committee meetings, briefings, and voting sessions. Attendance records will be maintained for each scheduled meeting of the council and committee.

**EXCUSED ABSENCES:** If a member expects to be late or absent, the member should inform the Chair and/or appropriate committee staff from the Office of Council Services in advance of the hearing (to the extent possible) for the absence to be marked excused. It is the Chairman's discretion to make the determination of whether an absence is excused.

**DECORUM:** Members should maintain professional dress and appearance while on camera as though they were in council chambers. Members of the public who are disruptive during hearings may be asked to leave or ejected from the virtual hearing. Staff from the Office of Council Services or President's Office will be present to assist members and the public with technical issues as they arise.

## **II. HEARING PROCEDURES**

Committees generally have two types of hearings – bill/resolution hearings and Legislative Oversight briefings.

**Hearing Schedule:** Committee Chairs have discretion over the scheduling (subject to Council Rules and statutory requirements), length, and conduct of all committee hearings, voting session, and other meetings. Members should submit requests for hearing on their bills to the committee Chair. Unless a bill is time-sensitive or other important considerations warrant it, bills should be scheduled for hearing no sooner than three weeks after introduction.

The hearing schedule will be updated within 24 hours of each council meeting to reflect newly-announced hearings. The hearing schedule is posted on LegiStar.

**Bill/Resolution Hearings:** Committee hearings and voting sessions will begin at the time published in the hearing schedule. Bill/resolution hearings will consist of the following elements. These elements may be reordered/changed/omitted at the Chair's discretion:

- Housekeeping/Procedural notices for attendees from the Chair and/or Council Services
- Remarks from the Chair
- Reading of the bill title
- Sponsor testimony

- Agency Reports
- Public testimony

*Hearing Testimony* – Typically, testimony will be heard in the following order: (1) Sponsor testimony; (2) Agency Reports; (3) Supportive testimony; (3) Support with amendments testimony; and (4) Unfavorable testimony. However, the Chairman has the discretion to change this order.

Members of the public and interested organizations can sign up to deliver oral or written testimony in advance of a bill hearing at [www.baltimorecitycouncil.com/testify](http://www.baltimorecitycouncil.com/testify). Written testimony can be also submitted in advance to [testimony@baltimorecity.gov](mailto:testimony@baltimorecity.gov). The Chair has discretion to recognize witnesses and receive public testimony from individuals who did not register beforehand during the hearing.

Witnesses are urged NOT to read prepared testimony or to repeat prior testimony. In order to expedite the hearing and allow all witnesses an opportunity to be heard, the Chairman has the prerogative to limit questions from the members or the time for witnesses to testify.

While all members of the Council are invited to attend any committee meetings, Chairs should give priority to questions from members of the committee.

Reminders for witness testimony:

- Members should treat witnesses with respect and civility.
- Members should ask questions of witnesses, not make statements.
- Members should ask one question of a witness, then give each other member of the committee an opportunity to ask before asking additional questions.
- Witnesses should direct any questions for the committee, sponsor, or municipal agencies through the Chair.

*Written Testimony* – The President’s Office or Office of Council Services will add all written testimony received on a bill to the online bill file on LegiStar as soon as possible in advance of a hearing. Written testimony may be uploaded at [www.baltimorecitycouncil.com/testify](http://www.baltimorecitycouncil.com/testify) or emailed to [testimony@baltimorecity.gov](mailto:testimony@baltimorecity.gov).

**Legislative Oversight (LO) Hearings:** LO hearings are public meetings held at the request of the Chair to provide specific budget and policy information to the Committee. Due to the nature of these briefings, only individuals who are invited by the Chairman to present may do so. The Chair retains the discretion to accept public testimony at LO hearings.

**Work Sessions and Voting Sessions:** The Chair may schedule work sessions and voting sessions on legislation at his or her discretion. Additional public testimony may be taken at work sessions at the discretion of the Chair. If a bill is significantly amended in committee the Chair should provide an opportunity for public comment on the amended bill.

### **III. Voting**

#### **Generally:**

- A favorable vote of the majority of the members of the committee will be required to report a bill out of the committee favorably.
- A favorable vote of the majority of the members of the committee present at the voting session will be required to adopt an amendment to a bill or to adopt a budget action. Votes on amendments are recorded only at the discretion of the Chair.
- A vote cast during a voting session is final.
- A committee member may not change his or her vote following the conclusion of a voting session.
- *Proxy Votes* – A committee member must be present at the voting session and with their camera on in order to cast a vote. Exceptions may be made in the event of technical difficulty.

**Amendments:** All amendments must be prepared in the proper form by the Department of Legislative Reference before being taken up in committee. DLR has made changes to their amendment format to ensure members are clear which amendments are under committee consideration at a given time. Only amendments sponsored by a Member of administrative agency will be considered in committee.

Members should have their amendments prepared by DLR in advance of a hearing or voting session. Amendments should be emailed to the staff member for the committee, the council's Executive Secretary, and the Director of Fiscal and Legislative Services in advance of a hearing or voting session. Council Services and the President's Office will work diligently to ensure Members, administrative agencies, and the general public have access to amendments and they are posted online prior to a committee vote to the greatest extent possible.

DLR will only accept requests to draft amendments from Members or their staff directly, or from administrative agencies of city government.

### **IV. Floor Actions/Passing Legislation**

Bills reported favorably by a committee will be reported to the full council at the next scheduled meeting of the body.

If a bill has been amended in committee, the Chair or floor leader will give a brief description of the amendments before the council considers the committee report. Council Services and/or the President's staff will assist committee leaders with preparing summaries of committee action for the floor.

### **V. Council Chambers**

While the Council continues to meet virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic the council chambers will remain closed to the general public and members should limit their visits to the council chambers. During meetings or hearings, only the President or Chair and the minimal staff necessary to continue the hearing should be in chambers.

Members are free to – and encouraged, if they do not have reliable internet access elsewhere - to make use of their office in City Hall to participate in hearings and council meetings. Please follow all applicable safety protocols when working from City Hall.