



April 3, 2020

President Pro Tempore Scarnati, Speaker Turzai, Majority Leader Corman, Minority Leader Costa, Majority Leader Cutler, and Minority Leader Dermody:

I am writing to you on behalf of the members of the PA Association for Government Relations, (PAGR). While we understand that this is a time like no other we have ever experienced and there was little time to prepare, if the Legislature plans to continue conducting business as they have the last two weeks, then there are issues of transparency and the rights of the public to petition government we feel must be addressed.

As you know, traditionally, public access to documents has been easiest when a citizen can be physically present in the capitol. True, we have come a long way since the days of lobbyists having mailboxes in the document rooms. On a session day now, I can stream session, most committee meetings, track the House Floor activity in which bills and floor amendments are available online and floor votes are delayed until new printers' numbers are available. Still, even before the pandemic was upon us, full "public access" has meant paying for a lobbyist or online service to track activity on the Hill or being there yourself. This is especially true of committee activity – where access to committee amendments means showing up to get a packet or paying a service to pick it up for you.

During this time of social distancing, with the Capitol closed and legislators and staff working remotely, we are still responsible for representing our respective constituencies and the public's access to their state government remains sacrosanct.

One example from last week to illustrate our concerns: when the Legislature was in session remotely and the Election Code was being amended in committee, a PAGR member whose review and input was sought could not get access to a copy of an amendment. Not being able to see the language and review it in conjunction with existing language made it all but impossible for this PAGR member to effectively represent their community. Ultimately, the amended bill was not publicly available as it was proceeding to a floor vote. While we know this was not intended, we worry similar situations will occur or become commonplace if nothing is done. As always, transparency in the legislative process helps ensure public trust and often leads to a better public policy outcome.

Therefore, on behalf of PAGR, the wider lobbying community and the public in general, I am asking you to enter into a dialogue with the Association on how all documents that are part of the legislative process can be made public in a timely fashion. PAGR's Board looks forward to working with you during this understandably difficult time to carry on the functions of the Legislature while upholding the right of the public to petition government.

Sincerely,

Peter Trufahnestock, President  
PA Association for Government Relations

cc: Megan Martin, Senate Secretary and Parliamentarian  
Clancy Myer, House Office of the Parliamentarian  
Vincent DeLiberato, Director, Legislative Reference Bureau  
Brent McClintock, Executive Director, Legislative Data Processing Center