



April 21, 2020

President of the Senate Drew Perkins
Speaker of the House Steve Harshman
Members of the Management Council

Re: Making Management Council Meeting Materials Available to the Public & Allowing for More Public Participation

Dear President Perkins, Speaker Harshman, and esteemed Members of the Wyoming State Legislature's Management Council:

The Equality State Policy Center and our 30 member organizations throughout Wyoming wish to thank you for your ongoing work in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

These are unprecedented times. Legislators and the public are unable to convene in person, in the same location, to conduct the business of Wyoming in the way it has traditionally been conducted throughout the history of this great state.

We understand the Management Council, other members of the Legislature, and the Legislative Service Office are continuing to look for new ways to afford opportunities for public input and provide the necessary transparency for an open and successful legislative process.

As we all get more acquainted with video-conference-based legislative meetings, we're beginning to observe some of the opportunities and challenges of this approach when it comes legislative decision making.

For example, toward the end of the April 16, 2020 Management Council meeting, the committee discussed proposed policies and procedures for legislators during the anticipated emergency special session (or sessions), including pay, travel compensation, special session courses of action, and other matters of great interest to the public. This information will be essential for your ongoing operations in 2020; we respectfully request that information like this be made available to the public on the Wyoming State Legislature's website.

In support of our collective interest in transparency and public involvement, we also respectfully submit the following recommendations for further improving the process in the short term.

1. **Ensure meeting materials are made available to the public prior to meetings, whenever possible.**
 - During the Management Council meeting on April 16, 2020, several documents were referenced and discussed that the public did not have the ability to view. Two examples:
 - Budget and Fiscal Administrator Don Richards' presentation on the projected impacts of COVID-19 to state revenues
 - A memo prepared by LSO on special session options and Wyoming constitutional requirements
 - Both documents could have been made available during the meeting on the Legislative website or in the meeting chat feature.
 - In the future, proposed legislation, especially, should be available to the public prior to any votes.

2. Allow for public feedback and comments submitted in advance of meetings.

- Traditionally, when committee meetings are held in person, draft documents or internal memos that have been prepared by the LSO—although often not available prior to the meetings—are available to the public and to the news media, as hard copies, at the meeting itself.
- We ask that when meetings are held virtually and/or via video conferencing, these documents be made available for the public to review and comment on prior to the meetings when possible, and posted in the chat feature and to the website during the meeting if they are not available in advance.
- As you work to respond quickly and thoughtfully to the COVID-19 crisis, the proposed policies and documents will be as important for the public to see and understand as bill drafts are during “normal” times.

3. Create opportunities for real-time public testimony and input.

- We appreciate the Management Council’s efforts thus far to allow for public and agency presenters via Zoom to engage on specific agenda topics.
- We encourage you to also develop mechanisms for general participation for members of the public who would like to testify and make their voices heard.
- We suggest this could be managed, for example, via an online sign-up form in advance of meetings.
- The technology exists to allow for real-time public participation and testimony, and we believe it is reasonable and feasible to employ this technology as soon as possible.

4. Continue, as you have done thus far, to livestream all interim committee meetings this year.

We believe these practices and this proposed level of transparency is critical for Wyoming citizens to be able to follow along and engage. It will also help foster public input and feedback before you meet, as well as during the meetings.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these requests. And thank you for your dedication and service on behalf of the citizens of Wyoming.

Sincerely,



Chris Merrill
Executive Director
Equality State Policy Center

cc: Matt Obrecht, LSO