

MEMORANDUM

TO: All House Members-elect of the 87th Legislature

FROM: Charlie Geren

DATE: December 14, 2020

SUBJECT: Opening Day Operational Plan

In response to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and as a result of discussions of the Workgroup on Legislative Operations during a Pandemic, ceremonial and operational modifications will be implemented for opening day of the 87th Legislature. The duration of the ceremony will be shortened, and there will be a significant reduction in the number of people admitted to the House floor and gallery. Additional details regarding ticketing, testing, seating, media access, and other logistics are forthcoming.

The modifications outlined below are necessary to ensure the health and safety of the Members-elect, guests, staff, media, and the public, while providing a meaningful ceremony to celebrate Members' election to the Texas House of Representatives of the 87th Legislature in compliance with constitutional and statutory requirements for the ceremony. Under Section 301.001, Government Code, the legislature is required to convene at 12 noon on January 12, 2021, and under Section 301.004, Government Code, the oath of office is administered simultaneously to all Members-elect by the Chief Clerk, immediately following the required roll call in district number order.

General Health & Safety Protocols

In addition to the State Preservation Board's facility sanitation protocols, Xenex UV disinfecting units will be utilized on the House floor and in the gallery. Hand sanitation stations will be stationed outside all doors to the House floor and gallery and on Members' desks.

Puradigm air purification units have been installed in the HVAC system above the House floor and gallery. These purification units have proven effective in killing the COVID-19 virus in the air and on surfaces and will reduce the viral burden in the space.

Members' desk chairs are spaced 5'10" front-to-back and 4'11" side-to-side. Opening day guests, whether seated on the floor outside the brass rail or in the gallery, will be spaced approximately 3'6" side-to-side and staggered front-to-back. This spacing, coupled with required face coverings, is acceptable to medical professionals consulted by the House.

Opening Day Health Screening & COVID-19 Testing

Prior to arriving at the Capitol, all Members-elect, guests, media, and staff are encouraged to self-screen for symptoms of COVID-19. There may be additional temperature and symptomatic screenings upon entry into the building.

All Members-elect, guests, media, and staff attending the opening day ceremony and seated on the House floor or in the gallery will be asked to take a COVID-19 test. Guests, media, and staff who test positive for COVID-19 will not be permitted to enter the House floor or gallery. Arrangements will be made for Members-elect who test positive for COVID-19 to allow them to take the oath of office.

Face Coverings

Face coverings will be required for all Members-elect, guests, media, and staff entering the House floor or gallery.

Access & Seating

Access to the House floor will be restricted to Members-elect, temporary officers, essential staff, ceremony participants, and approved guests. The public, media, and additional approved guests will be seated in the House gallery.

The use of stairs to access the House floor and gallery is encouraged. In an effort to reduce the number of people arriving to the House floor and gallery at the same time, a designated seating time will be assigned to each Member-elect and approved guest.

Members-elect will be seated at their desks. Each Member-elect will be provided two guest seats, either outside the brass rail on the House floor, as space allows, or in the gallery. All guest seating will be assigned, reserved, and ticketed.

For Members-elect participating in an opening day ceremony for the first time, both guest seats will be located on the House floor. Remaining guest seats on the House floor will be assigned to Members-elect in order of seniority, with one floor guest seat assigned per Member-elect, until all floor seats have been assigned. Remaining designated guests of Members-elect will be assigned seats in the gallery.

No overflow seating outside of the House floor or gallery will be provided. Members-elect are encouraged to use their individual offices to host and provide TV or livestream access to the ceremony for immediate family members who will not have assigned seats on the floor or in the gallery. Additional guests and members of the public who wish to view the ceremony are encouraged to watch the livestream via <https://house.texas.gov/video-audio/>.

Public Seating

There will be a limited number of seats available in the gallery for members of the public. An announcement of the process for assigning those seats is forthcoming.

Media & Photography

Information regarding media access will be distributed to members of the press in advance of opening day.

House Photography will take photographs of Members-elect taking the oath of office and throughout the ceremony. Personal photography will be allowed ONLY from one's seat.