

RELEASE: HOUSE REPUBLICANS BLOCK PATH FORWARD TO REMOTE SESSIONS

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New Hampshire House of Representatives Concord, New Hampshire House Democratic Office

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HOUSE REPUBLICANS BLOCK PATH FORWARD TO REMOTE SESSIONS

CONCORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE – Today, House Republicans blocked an amendment to House Rule 67 that would have given explicit authority to the House to meet “in person, virtually, or as a hybrid of in person and virtually.” Following the vote, **Representative Lucy Weber (D-Walpole)** released the following statement:

“This vote shows that House Republicans have absolutely no interest in working to protect the safety and wellbeing of Representatives, staff, and Granite Staters in every corner of the state. Meeting in person is a dangerous and unnecessary risk to take. For weeks, Republicans have been relying on a misleading claim that the House is not allowed to meet virtually because we do not have specific House Rules authorizing us to do so. To be clear, this is a matter of opinion and opportunistic interpretation and not fact.”

“The amendment I proposed would have given explicit authority to the House to meet virtually or as a hybrid of in person and virtually. It did not mandate anything, but simply provided the language that House Republicans have said is necessary to move forward with remote options for House Sessions. This unnecessary action by House Republicans puts us and our communities at more risk, period.”

“For a legislative body the size of the New Hampshire House, the pandemic has presented major hurdles,” added **Democratic Leader Pro Tempore Karen Ebel (D-New London)**, who has been deeply involved with the legislature’s transition to virtual meetings since March. “We have been working nonstop to adapt and transition work to virtual formats for over eight months. By not permitting the House to meet remotely, Republicans are forcing Representatives to choose between their health and the health of their constituents, and their duty to represent their constituents. The decision to block the option for remote sessions effectively deprives untold numbers of voters of representation by their elected officials who cannot attend for health reasons. This is untenable, dangerous and unnecessarily restricts the legislature from doing its important work for the state.”

On background:

- The proposed amendment to House Rule 67 would have added section (g) and read as follows:
 - (g) The House may meet in person, virtually, or as a hybrid of in person and virtually, and a quorum present may be determined virtually in whole or in part.
- House Republicans have repeatedly argued that House Rules do not allow the House to meet

virtually.

- In the December 18th House Calendar, Acting Speaker Sherman Packard said, “It is my opinion, in talking with our staff, that we are not prepared to run an election for speaker or conduct our business for adopting rules in a remote meeting or hybrid situation, nor do our rules allow for it.”
 - http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/house/caljournals/calendars/2021/HC_4.pdf
- In the December 21st House Calendar, Acting Speaker Sherman Packard said, “The House has not adopted a rule which allows it to meet remotely, either wholly or in part, and until such a time as the members adopt such a rule, we are obligated to meet in-person.”
 - http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/house/caljournals/calendars/2021/HC_5.pdf
- It has been the practice and precedent of the House since March to proceed with remote committee meetings.
- On Wednesday December 16, the House Rules Committee met and conducted business virtually. There was no specific House Rule granting that authority, but rather practice and precedent was relied on in combination with guidance from the Governor’s Emergency Order #12.
- During the 2020 session, the New Hampshire legislature developed and successfully deployed an effective method of doing committee work remotely, while also following the Right To Know laws, using the Governor’s Emergency Order #12 as guidance.
 - <https://www.governor.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt336/files/documents/emergency-order-12.pdf>
- The New Hampshire Supreme Court has ruled that a quorum of the House of Representatives may be established by electronic means.
 - <https://www.courts.state.nh.us/caseinfo/pdf/supremerequest/2020/111720-Opinion.pdf>
- A review of the NCSL website alone indicates that many states have adopted procedures permitting them to conduct legislative business on a remote basis, both in committee and in legislative session.
 - <https://www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures/covid-19-state-actionsrelated-to-legislative-operations.aspx>

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