

Gonczarek, Melinda

From: GENTLEMAN
Sent: Thursday, 11 August 2022 2:40 PM
To: LA Committee - Estimates
Cc: BURCH
Subject: RE: Correspondence from Minister Gentleman
Attachments: Correspondence from Minister Gentleman MLA - Select Committee on Estimates 2022-23.pdf

Importance: High

Good afternoon

Please find attached further correspondence from Minister Gentleman regarding estimates hearing arrangements.

Regards



Ellen Pinkas
Senior Adviser – Planning and Land Management
Office of Minister Mick Gentleman MLA
ellen.pinkas@act.gov.au | W: 02 6207 0752

From: LA Committee - Estimates <LACommitteeEstimates@parliament.act.gov.au>
Sent: Thursday, 11 August 2022 12:34 PM

To: GENTLEMAN <GENTLEMAN@act.gov.au>
Cc: Pinkas, Ellen <Ellen.Pinkas@act.gov.au>; Turner, Alicia <Alicia.Turner@act.gov.au>; Kandola, Shobaz <Shobaz.Kandola@act.gov.au>
Subject: RE: Correspondence from Minister Gentleman

OFFICIAL

Good afternoon Ellen,

Please find attached the Chair's response to Minister Gentleman's letter.

Regards,

Dr David Monk
Senior Director, Committee Support
Office of the Legislative Assembly
02 620 50129
david.monk@parliament.act.gov.au
www.parliament.act.gov.au

From: GENTLEMAN <GENTLEMAN@act.gov.au>
Sent: Thursday, 11 August 2022 12:20 PM
To: LA Committee - Estimates <LACommitteeEstimates@parliament.act.gov.au>
Subject: FW: Correspondence from Minister Gentleman
Importance: High

Good afternoon

I am following up on behalf of the Minister as we have not received a response to his letter sent on Monday. Given the urgency of this matter (hearings commence on Monday), when can we expect a response from the Chair confirming the hearing arrangements?

Regards
Ellen

Ellen Pinkas
Senior Adviser – Planning and Land Management
Office of Minister Mick Gentleman MLA
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From: GENTLEMAN
Sent: Monday, 8 August 2022 3:16 PM
To: LA Committee - Estimates <LACommitteeEstimates@parliament.act.gov.au>
Cc: BURCH <BURCH@parliament.act.gov.au>
Subject: Correspondence from Minister Gentleman

Dear Committee

Please find attached correspondence from Minister Gentleman.

Kind regards

Office of Mick Gentleman MLA
Minister for Planning and Land Management
Minister for Police and Emergency Services
Minister for Corrections
Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety
Manager of Government Business
Member for Brindabella

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Mick Gentleman MLA

Manager of Government Business
Minister for Planning and Land Management
Minister for Police and Emergency Services
Minister for Corrections
Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety

Member for Brindabella

James Milligan MLA

Chair

Select Committee on Estimates 2022-23

ACT Legislative Assembly

CANBERRA ACT 2601

By email: LACommitteeEstimates@parliament.act.gov.au

Dear Chair *JAMES*

I write in response to the most recent letter from the Committee concerning Estimates. I again express the Government's strong recommendation for the upcoming Budget Estimates Hearings to be offered in a hybrid manner. Hybrid attendance is warranted to permit those staff who are required to attend to choose whether they attend in person or virtually to support ongoing COVID-smart arrangements given current rates of community transmission and the uncertainty of the current situation.

The ACT Chief Health Officer continues to recommend ongoing adherence to COVID-smart behaviours such as physical distancing, mask wearing indoors and staying home when unwell. As recently as 8 August 2022, ACT Health have issued public health communications to continue to recommend mask wearing indoors. The Chief Health Officer has also extended the public health emergency in the ACT until 11:59pm on 30 September 2022 due to the uncertainty of the epidemiological situation. A hybrid offering of Budget Estimates Hearings will prevent crowding and enhance physical distancing for those attending face-to-face and reduce the burden on those staff required to implement COVID-smart controls during proceedings, such as through increased cleaning protocols of desks and equipment between staff attending the committee.

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The ACT Government prides itself on being an inclusive employer, where people of all backgrounds are valued, included and safe in our workplaces.

By failing to offer our staff the option to attend hearings virtually, we are excluding valued and diverse members of our workforce who may be exposed to serious risk when attending due to their personal health status, the personal health status of their loved ones, or due to their own exposure to COVID-19, from participating in the hearings. The ACT Government is obligated under the *Work Health and Safety Act (2011)* as an employer to provide safe workplaces for our staff, including those who are at increased risk of serious illness during the COVID-19 pandemic. The transmission of COVID-19 is considered a foreseeable risk during the pandemic which requires employers to implement targeted risk management strategies to eliminate or reduce the risk of infection including through measures such as hybrid attendance.

Given the rates of infection in the ACT, it would be reasonable to conclude that transmission is at least possible, or indeed likely, at an event requiring large numbers of staff from across the Canberra region to attend face-to-face, share furniture and equipment, and speak in an enclosed space for prolonged periods. Those staff attending are in critical roles from across the Service, where their absence due to illness would have significant impacts on business continuity in workforces that are already stretched due to staff absences and increased service demand. Hybrid attendance would reduce the risk of large groups of staff, or an entire team, in our critical workforces from becoming unwell or being required to reduce their movement in the community after a high-risk exposure.

Requiring face-to-face attendance may disrupt proceedings where key information is unable to be provided in a timely manner during proceedings due to the absence of staff who would have otherwise been able to participate virtually and provide information immediately. This is likely to result in a large number of questions on notice, or a requirement to schedule additional Estimates sessions, which could place additional burden on other critical business operations in both the Assembly and the Government.

Noting assurances that COVID-smart arrangements will be in place such as physical distancing, I draw your attention to evidence that suggest that members of the assembly are unaware of, or noncompliant with, COVID-smart arrangements for workplaces. For example, a recent post by Mr Peter Cain MLA on his Twitter account posted on 9 August 2022 at 5:20pm shows a photograph of the Educational and Community Inclusion Committee's inquiry. This photo demonstrates that COVID-smart arrangements are not being consistently implemented, or indeed implemented at all, in the Legislative Assembly. In the photograph there is no visible evidence of physical distancing between members, masks are not being worn, there is no hand sanitiser visible, and members appear to be gathered in an enclosed space for what appears to be a prolonged period. This indicates a very limited understanding as to what is appropriate during this period of increased risk of transmission.

As MLAs we are role models in the local and regional community, including to businesses and employers in our region. Throughout the pandemic the Assembly has taken a non-partisan approach to expressing support for the best public health advice and work health and safety responsibilities in managing the spread of COVID-19. It is incumbent upon us as leaders in the region to model and

support those public health recommendations to reduce the risk, and as an employer to ensure work health and safety obligations are met and are demonstrated to our valuable staff.

Noting rates of transmission both in the community, and in ACT Government workplaces, and the well-known impacts this has had on business continuity, workforce attendance, service delivery and workload management, I would expect members to support modes that reduce the risk to our staff and the impacts on service delivery for our community.

I look forward to hearing from you that Budget Estimates Hearings will occur in a hybrid manner to those staff who are required to be available to answer the Committee's questions.

Yours sincerely


Mick Gentleman MLA
Manager of Government Business
Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety

11/8/2022

Cc: Speaker (burch@parliament.act.gov.au)

