

February 2, 2023

Committee Leadership
1100 Gervais St
Columbia, SC 29208

To the committee chairs in the General Assembly:

I am writing to express my concern regarding the lack of transparency and openness during the current legislative session. I hope that the ACLU of South Carolina can be a partner to you to increase public engagement in your committee.

During the current session, I have seen the public excluded from the legislative process on multiple occasions. Some bills have skipped the subcommittee process all together, despite new legislators not having the benefit of hearing testimony from the previous session. Other bills had testimony limited to only 60 seconds, and in some cases, the public was given mixed messages about whether they could testify at all.

I understand how difficult it must be to balance the scheduling needs of your committee with the need to hear public comment. I would ask that you prioritize the General Assembly's duty to listen to constituents as they attempt to engage around the issues that matter deeply to them. I know your goal is to serve the people of South Carolina; creating a space for residents to voice their opinions is part of the obligation to serve. A desire for efficiency should never outweigh the need to hear the voices of constituents who want to participate in the legislative process.

In service to South Carolinians, I encourage you to use your power as Committee Chairperson to facilitate public engagement through the following actions:

- Ensure every bill receives a subcommittee hearing, as they are the only opportunities for the public to testify.
- Provide more than 24-hour notice for subcommittee hearings to allow constituents time to travel to Columbia from their homes.
- Encourage subcommittee members to review submitted written testimony in advance of meetings.
- Ask members of the public to sign up when they arrive at meetings, not in advance.
- Call speakers to testify in the order in which they signed up.
- Allow all members of the public in attendance to testify—for at least three minutes.

I would be glad to meet with you to discuss these suggestions or any others that may make the South Carolina State House a place where citizens feel empowered to engage with those who serve them in the General Assembly.

Respectfully,

Jace Woodrum
Executive Director, ACLU of South Carolina