

ADD YOUR VOICE TO THE CALL FOR TRANSPARENCY AND DEMOCRACY IN THE MASSACHUSETTS LEGISLATURE

On September 25, 2021, MA Democrats will meet in a platform convention and vote on the state Democratic Party platform for the next four years. We want it to include a clear and strong platform plank demanding reform of the MA Legislature to provide greater transparency, democracy, and accountability.

You can:

Attend a virtual platform hearing (Aug 2-14) and testify and/or

Submit written testimony.

Go to <https://massdems.org/2021-massdems-platform-convention/2021-party-platform/> to find hearing dates, register to attend a hearing, and learn how to submit written testimony.

Proposed platform language: *The laws, rules, and informal procedures that govern the conduct of the business of the MA Senate and House of Representatives shall provide for a full and fair opportunity for citizen engagement through public access to information at all stages of the legislative process, timely disclosure of bills before votes, independent assessment of legislation, and opportunity for input. They shall also uphold the independence of individual legislators through fair compensation and staffing, as well as their accountability through disclosure of all committee and session votes, and leadership shall not exercise their powers to reward or punish legislators for the votes or positions they take.*

Below are suggested talking points for a hearing or points to make in written testimony to explain why you feel this language should be included in the platform. Feel free to use or not use these arguments or to edit them in any way. What's most important is that your testimony reflects your reasons and style, and that you are comfortable giving it. If you've experienced frustration with the Legislature with a particular piece of legislation or anything else, please share your personal experience – that will make your testimony particularly meaningful and effective.

I feel this language is needed in the Democratic Party Platform because the MA Legislature does NOT currently operate in a democratic and transparent manner. The concentration of power in the hands of leadership produces a closed, hierarchical organization that disempowers rank-and-file Members and the public.

The legislative process as it stands is not conducive to enacting the people's will – there are many instances of highly popular legislation that takes years to get

passed or doesn't get passed at all or where citizens have to use the ballot initiative process to get it enacted. It has been well documented that because of the closed-door decision-making process, lobbyists and well-connected special interests have tremendous influence in the Legislature, while the public does not.

The opacity of the legislative process (e.g., lack of record votes) and lack of access to information (e.g., about committee hearings and decision-making) are key contributing factors to this legislative dysfunction. The concentration of power in the hands of leadership (e.g., through appointment of committee chairs and the substantial pay increases that go with them and control members' office space and staffing) and its use to reward and punish Members are key contributing factors to the disempowerment of Members, and, therefore, the disenfranchisement of their constituents.

Ultimately, the practices of the MA Legislature undermine democracy, Members' ability to meaningfully participate in policy making, and voters' ability to hold their representatives accountable.

If you do testify, in writing or at a virtual hearing, please let us know so we can track the number of supporters for use in advocacy later in the process. Please email us at info@progressivedemsofmass.org to let us know that you testified.