

**Reinvent Albany
BetaNYC
Brennan Center for Justice
Citizens Union of the City of New York
Common Cause/NY
League of Women Voters of New York State
New York Public Interest Research Group**

April 13, 2021

Carl Heastie
Speaker, New York State Assembly

Re: Please make good on promises made in 2016 to fully webcast all committee meetings, including those which members currently participate in via video conference

Dear Speaker Heastie,

We ask you to fully webcast and archive all New York State Assembly Committee meetings on the Assembly's website. We note that committee meetings are currently being held via video for Assemblymembers, but members of the public can only listen to live audio and do not get to see the video stream or see archived video.

When you became Speaker in 2016, you promised to take immediate action to implement the recommendations from the Workgroup on Legislative Process, Operations, and Public Participation to promote transparency and increase member effectiveness.¹ These included:

- Making audio and video webcasts of committee meetings available on the Assembly website. Specifically, the recommendations stated that a simple webcam and/or audio access should be implemented promptly, with full video access as soon as practicable, beginning with key committees like Codes and Ways & Means.
- Ensuring that archived video recordings of session, public hearings, and committee meetings are available promptly online to all Members and the public on the Assembly website.
- Indexing recordings and transcripts of Session, and recordings of public hearings and committee meetings, so all of these are linked to bills and searchable by bill.

Yet the Judiciary Committee's highly anticipated March 23, 2021 meeting about the Assembly's impeachment investigation was broadcast via audio, though Chair Charles Lavine noted that the members and lawyers representing the Assembly had joined via Zoom. Audio from this committee meeting is available on the Judiciary Committee's website, but it is not available on the Assembly's A/V website archive (<https://nyassembly.gov/av/>).²

¹ Press Release, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie. "Assembly to Implement Workgroup Recommendations to Strengthen Operations and Promote Transparency." March 17, 2016. <https://nyassembly.gov/Press/20160317/>

See full report here: <https://nyassembly.gov/Press/20160317/recommendations20160317.pdf>

² Assembly Judiciary Committee webpage, <https://assembly.state.ny.us/comm/?id=24>

Live Audio Provided For Committee Meetings, But Not Archived

Audio for other committee meetings is only provided live at the time of the meeting, and is not available after the meeting on the Assembly A/V website's archive. Given that committee meeting times are subject to change, it is difficult for the public to know exactly when to listen to the live committee audio. The recent Codes Committee on March 30, 2021 was originally scheduled for 10:00am, and high-profile legislation to legalize cannabis was on the agenda. The Codes Committee meeting was then moved to 1:30pm, but not actually held until 2:05pm, more than 30 minutes later than the rescheduled time. Updates for changes to committee meetings are not available on the Assembly's Twitter feed, nor does the Committee Agenda page specifically note changes made to the meeting times. Unpredictable meeting times without archived audio makes it very difficult for the public to listen to committee meetings.

Archived Assembly video is only available for meetings that are currently webcast with video, such as committee hearings, budget hearings and joint budget conference meetings, interviews for positions like the NYS Board of Regents, and session proceedings.³

Meanwhile, the New York State Senate has provided live and archived video of its committee meetings via YouTube for more than ten years, beginning in 2009.⁴

Provided at the end of this letter are screenshots of how the live links and/or audio for Assembly Committee meetings appear on the "Upcoming Events" and "Live Coverage" page of the Assembly A/V website.

Public Should See All Committee Meetings Held via Zoom

We recognize that COVID-19 has changed the way we all do business, and the Legislature is no exception. As many of our groups wrote to you in January, it is important for the Legislature to address new challenges stemming from remote legislative work under the COVID-19 pandemic and improve public confidence in the legislative process.⁵

Technology has made remote work possible, and the Legislature has used platforms such as Zoom to hold committee meetings, hearings, and budget conferences. While some of these meetings have been viewable by the public, committee meetings have not. There is no longer the concern about the technological requirements necessary to webcast meetings from committee rooms, as the Legislature has already adapted by holding these meetings remotely with video. It is simply a matter of also letting the public see the existing video and view what is already available for legislators and staff.

³ See the Assembly A/V website, <https://assembly.state.ny.us/av/>

⁴ See the NYS Senate YouTube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVJzgJ1u9YANbvHDHryZO2g>

⁵ Group Letter to Legislative Leaders Re: Rules Reform and Legislative Activity in Remote Conditions, January 4, 2021. Available at:
<https://reinventalbany.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Letter-Rules-Reform-and-Legislative-Activity-in-Remote-Conditions-2021-12.31.20.pdf>

We therefore ask that the Assembly webcast all of its committee meetings with video, and include archival footage of committee meetings with other proceedings on its A/V website, as is the current practice for the NYS Senate.

Sincerely,

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Screenshots of Assembly Live Audio Links - Accessed March 30, 2021

Upcoming Events

Archived videos are arranged by date, with the most recent at the top of the list. Click [Video](#) to watch the meeting with documents, or [Agenda / Minutes](#) to see just the documents. You can also search the archives by typing keywords into the Search box.

The minimum system requirements for watching the Archived video [are available here](#).

[Streaming video support](#)

Upcoming Events

Name	Date	Agenda
3-30 Audio of Virtual Assembly Committee Meetings - Codes; Rules	March 30, 2021 - 01:15 PM	Agenda
3-30 Audio of Virtual Assembly Committee Meeting - Ways & Means	March 30, 2021 - 01:45 PM	Agenda
3-30 Session	March 30, 2021 - 02:45 PM	Agenda
3-31 Session	March 31, 2021 - 09:45 AM	



New York State ASSEMBLY

NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY
PLEASE STAND BY
 AUDIO FROM:
 CODES
 COMMITTEE MEETING
 TUESDAY, MARCH 30, 2021

3-30 Audio of Virtual Assembly Committee Meetings - Codes; Rules

Current Item:

Agenda

Bill Search Home Laws Legislative Calendar Public Hearing Schedule

Assembly Calendars **Assembly Committee Agenda** Assembly Home

Committee Agenda

The schedule of committee meetings can be found [here](#). Please note, depending on the overall weekly legislative schedule, these times may vary. For the most current information regarding when committees are meeting, see the following:

- [CODES](#) 03/30/2021
- [EDUCATION](#) 03/30/2021
- [GOVERNMENTAL EMPLOYEES](#) 03/30/2021
- [WAYS AND MEANS](#) 03/30/2021