



## FACT SHEET

### **Virtual Committee Meetings**

A motion was adopted by the House of Commons on March 24, 2020, authorizing, during the period the House stands adjourned, the Chair of the Standing Committee on Health (HESA) and the Chair of the Standing Committee on Finance (FINA) to convene meetings via videoconferencing or teleconferencing for the sole purpose of receiving evidence concerning matters related to the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, provided that, for greater certainty, each committee may receive evidence that may otherwise exceed the committee's mandate under Standing Order 108(2). In addition, the motion also allows, in part (i), for FINA to adopt a motion to report to the House in a specific circumstance. The full text of the motion can be found [here](#).

While the House of Commons has previously had witnesses testify before committees remotely, this will be the first time that Members of Parliament will also be participating remotely in order to hear witnesses.

#### **How will the media and the public be made aware of the details of the meetings?**

Committees will continue to follow their normal practice of publishing notices of meetings on [ourcommons.ca](http://ourcommons.ca) and sending information through the [@HoCCommittees](https://twitter.com/HoCCommittees) Twitter account. The proceedings will be broadcast via [ourcommons.ca](http://ourcommons.ca) using the regular [ParlVU](#) system. Blues of the meetings will be available in the usual way and, when available, the evidence of public meetings will also continue to be posted to each committee's website.

#### **How will the meetings take place?**

The motion adopted by the House allows for committee members to attend and witnesses to participate by either teleconference or videoconference. Meetings that were held on March 31 and April 2, 3, 7 and 8 took place via audio teleconference (audio only via [ourcommons.ca](http://ourcommons.ca)). The first committee meetings via videoconference will occur starting April 9. The video of these meetings will be available through [ourcommons.ca](http://ourcommons.ca).

### **Other parliaments and legislatures are already using videoconferencing systems for their proceedings**

The House of Commons has additional requirements, including—and most importantly—the need to ensure that the solutions fully support simultaneous interpretation, so that Members of Parliament and Canadians can follow the proceedings in the official language of their choice. While committees regularly hear from witnesses via videoconference, this is the first time the House has permitted Members of Parliament to participate in committee proceedings in this manner.

### **What technology will the House of Commons be using for committee meetings that are held via videoconference?**

The House of Commons has consulted widely with other legislatures and is also speaking with national and international security partners and continuing to work with technology-industry allies and leaders in the field of virtual collaboration. Multiple technology solutions that can enable virtual meetings have been assessed against the House's need for a viable and robust solution. At this time, the House of Commons has selected the Zoom solution to support committee meetings in which all individuals are participating remotely. The House of Commons Administration has been working to put the necessary elements in place to provide a virtual committee meeting experience that, while different, will ensure that critical elements, such as interpretation and broadcasting of proceedings, are integrated into the solution.

### **Can the media and the public attend meetings in person?**

No. The meetings are taking place virtually and, therefore, the only way to attend is to watch them via [ourcommons.ca](http://ourcommons.ca). The House of Commons is following the recommendations of public health officials in relation to physical distancing, so only a small number of staff will be on site to support the virtual meetings.

### **How can the media and the public access the meetings?**

Meetings will continue to be available live on [ourcommons.ca](http://ourcommons.ca). Teleconference meetings will be available by audio only and videoconference meetings will be webcast. Recordings of the meetings will also continue to be available on [ourcommons.ca](http://ourcommons.ca) after the meetings have concluded.

### **Could other committees also meet via teleconference or videoconference?**

Under the terms of the motion adopted by the House, only the two named committees, HESA and FINA, can meet by teleconference or videoconference. Although it is not a House committee created under the Standing Orders, the Board of Internal Economy is also meeting virtually.

## **Updates every two weeks to FINA**

Section (i) of the motion adopted by the House includes additional provisions for FINA, specifically, updates every two weeks and a mechanism to report to the House:

(i) starting the week of March 30, 2020, the Minister of Finance or his delegate shall provide the Standing Committee on Finance with a bi-weekly report on all actions undertaken pursuant to parts 3, 8 and 19 of the *COVID-19 Emergency Response Act* and shall appear before the committee to discuss the report, provided that, until April 20, 2020, or any date to which the adjournment period is extended pursuant to paragraph (f), if the committee is not satisfied with how the government is exercising its powers under the act, it may adopt a motion during a meeting by videoconference or teleconference to report this to the House by depositing a report with the Clerk of the House which shall be deemed to have been duly presented to the House on that day;

### **For more information:**

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