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**TO:** MEMBERS OF THE IOWA LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

**FROM:** SEN. JANET PETERSEN & REP. TODD PRICHARD

**SUBJECT:** SAFETY PRECAUTIONS FOR UPCOMING LEGISLATIVE SESSION

**DATE:** APRIL 29, 2020

**CC:** CHARLIE SMITHSON, MEGHAN NELSON

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The landscape in Iowa has changed dramatically since the Legislature recessed on March 17. At that time, there were 29 positive cases and no COVID-related deaths. Today, we are faced with more than 6,300 confirmed cases and more than 130 confirmed COVID-related deaths.

As lawmakers, we have important work to do to complete a new state budget and provide necessary oversight of the Executive Branch, especially in times of crisis.

Because of the expanding health care crisis in our state, we are recommending steps to ensure the health and safety of Iowans when the Iowa General Assembly reconvenes to finish its work.

We also are requesting that steps be taken by legislative leaders plan to make sure Iowans have enhanced access to all proceedings.

As you know, the Iowa Senate and House will not be the first legislative body to resume activity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unfortunately, other legislatures have ignored common sense by reconvening without regard to the health and safety of legislators, staff and the general public. The resulting publicity – including one headline: **“Lawmakers Defy Warnings, Continue To Meet In Capitols Across The Country”** -- sent the wrong message to constituents who are being asked practice social distancing and stay home except for essential activities.

Based on the appropriate steps taken by other state legislatures and U.S. Congress, we are recommending that Iowa legislative leaders:

- Require health screening of all legislators and others entering the Capitol.
- Advise members of the Iowa Senate and House to use extreme care and deliberation when making the determination about whether to travel to the Capitol.
- Advise all persons to maintain a 6-foot social distance spacing as much as practicable when in the Capitol.

- Advise legislators and mandate staff and others to use face coverings. This means that face covers and gloves will be provided to those who need them.
- Restrict access by legislators to the House and Senate chambers to those legislators who are scheduled to speak during debate.
- Advise legislators to use waterless hand sanitizer before entering and departing the House and Senate chambers. This means making hand sanitizer will be made available to those who need it.
- Require that voting by legislators be staggered to limit the number of legislators in the chamber at one time or develop procedures to vote remotely.
- Not allowing clerks, pages, doorkeepers and other nonessential staff to return to the Capitol.
- Continue to keep the Capitol closed for tours by schoolchildren and other visitors; and not allow outside groups to meet in the committee rooms and other spaces in the Capitol.

Because of the prohibition on gatherings of more than 10 people, we are requesting that extraordinary efforts be made to ensure public access to any upcoming proceedings of the Iowa Legislature. This includes:

- Livestreaming all subcommittee, committee and floor proceedings.
- Making all proposed legislation and amendments available to the public at least 72 hours in advance of any action by the House and Senate.
- Allowing access to the Capitol to all credentialed press.

We look forward to working with all legislative leaders to protect the health and safety of Iowans during the upcoming session, as well as ensuring transparency for the democratic process.

Signed,



Janet Petersen  
Senate Democratic Leader



Todd Prichard  
House Democratic Leader