



## Senator Katy Gallagher

Shadow Minister for Finance  
Shadow Minister for the Public Service  
Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate  
Senator for the Australian Capital Territory

Senator Scott Ryan  
President of the Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra  
ACT 2600

Dear Mr President

On March 23, 2020 the Senate passed a Resolution that would allow it to meet in a manner and form not otherwise provided for in the Standing Orders with agreement of both the Leader of the Government in the Senate and the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate.

This Resolution was designed to allow the Senate to meet if the conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic prevented it to meet in the usual way.

The outbreak of COVID-19 in Victoria, and emerging concerns in other parts of the country, have resulted in strict quarantine conditions being placed on many Senators who wish to attend the upcoming parliamentary sittings, due to begin on August 24.

These conditions, although necessary to minimise the risk of COVID-19, mean that many senators who wish to come to Canberra are unable to. Still other Senators, not in virus-affected states or territories, will choose not to attend Parliament out of an abundance of caution.

During the next sittings, the Parliament will debate a number of significant issues of national importance, including the extension and reduction of key income supports for many Australians.

Therefore, it is appropriate to consider whether limited accommodation can be made for Senators unable to attend Parliament physically, to make a remote contribution to debate.

I ask you to refer this matter to the Procedure Committee immediately for consideration under Standing Order 17(3). This would allow the Committee to consider all options which would allow members to contribute to debate in the Chamber via videopresence, for the upcoming sitting fortnight 24 August – 3 September only. I note the motions agreed to on 23 March and 8 April provided that the rules and orders necessary to constitute a meeting of the Senate in a manner and form not otherwise provided for in the standing orders may be determined by the Procedure Committee.

In seeking for this matter to be considered by the Procedure Committee, the Opposition proposes that Senators may, via videopresence in the chamber:

- seek the call;
- receive the call; and
- address the Senate.

The Opposition also proposes that comments made by Senators appearing via videopresence would be recorded in Hansard, as if they had been physically present in the Chamber.

Under these proposals, there would be no change to the requirement for a physical presence to make quorum, nor to the existing voting process in the Chamber.

I note that the Resolution of the Senate referenced above has lapsed and is no longer in affect. Therefore, any agreed changes to the Standing Orders or the way the Senate meets would require a new resolution of the Senate, which the Opposition suggests could be agreed to via motion and moved by leave, at the commencement of the sitting day on August 24, 2020.

I trust we can work cooperatively on this matter, and I look forward to further a discussion.

Yours sincerely

Katy Gallagher  
**Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate**  
**Senator for the ACT**

7 August 2020

cc – Senator Ruston, Manager of Government Business in the Senate.



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

**PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE**

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE SCOTT RYAN

Senator Sue Lines  
Chair  
Senate Standing Committee on Procedure  
Suite SG.44  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Chair,


**Reference of matters to the Senate Standing Committee on Procedure**

I have received a letter from the Manager of Opposition Business, Senator Gallagher, asking that I refer to the Procedure Committee, pursuant to standing order 17(3), the development of rules to accommodate the remote participation of senators in Senate proceedings by videopresence, where they are unable to attend the upcoming sittings of Parliament because of conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am happy to refer the matter, as requested.

A copy of Senator Gallagher's letter is attached.

Yours sincerely,

 SCOTT RYAN

7 August 2020 