



## **SAMANTHA RATNAM MLC**

State Member of Parliament for Northern Metropolitan Region

### **Leader of the Victorian Greens**

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The Hon Nazih Elasmr MLC  
President  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House

The Hon Colin Brooks MLA  
Speaker  
Legislative Assembly  
Parliament House

By email: [president@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:president@parliament.vic.gov.au) and [speaker@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:speaker@parliament.vic.gov.au)

26 August 2021

Dear President and Speaker

#### **Parliament sitting during COVID restrictions**

We are writing to request that the Victorian Parliament continue to meet in some form during the current COVID outbreak and any future outbreaks.

While we continue to respect the advice of the Chief Health Officer, we believe there are ways to make the sitting of the Victorian Parliament COVID-safe and ensure our democratic institutions continue to function.

We have had over a year to consider models of trying to make this work and we hope that we can find a way through as a matter of urgency. There are matters that the Parliament must consider urgently such as providing rental relief and other support for people being impacted by the pandemic as well as the important accountability role of the Parliament that must continue for a functioning democracy. For these reasons, we ask you to give this request serious consideration.

The Federal Parliament has instituted a range of procedures to manage sitting with minimal members in physical attendance, while many members are unable to attend in person. In essence, they have a hybrid model where members can participate remotely speaking to Bills, providing members statements and adjournments, and participating in Question Time. Voting occurs with only the people physically present utilising significant pairing arrangements across the chambers to ensure the result reflects the will of each chamber.

Such a system will require all political parties and the crossbench being willing to participate in a pairing system. However, we believe it is worth trying to reach agreement on a way parliament can continue to sit safely during COVID outbreaks and the federal parliament offers a useful model.

If the pairing system for voting requires more time to operationalise before next week, we suggest the Parliament could convene a sitting schedule that sees us meet remotely to do question time and second reading speeches for Bills and postpone the votes on those matters until we meet in person.

We acknowledge a parliamentary sitting requires support staff to be present in the precinct as well. We would hope agreement could also be reached on ways to minimise staff requirements, such as scheduling changes.

We look forward to working with you and all members to find a way for Parliament to continue to sit and perform its vital role.

Yours sincerely



**Samantha Ratnam**  
Leader of the Victorian Greens



**Ellen Sandell**  
Deputy Leader of the Victorian Greens