Legislative Session for the Week of March 17 Postponed

Future return to session will be re-evaluated weekly

DOVER – In response to growing concerns about the Coronavirus pandemic, House Speaker Pete Schwartzkopf and Senate President Pro Tempore David McBride announced Thursday that the Delaware General Assembly is postponing next week's legislative session.

The legislature was scheduled to return from its break for Joint Finance Committee hearings on March 17, but the spread of COVID-19 and recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control, the World Health Organization and Delaware public health officials prompted this proactive decision.

"After careful consideration and consultation with various state agencies, we believe delaying our return is the right decision to ensure the safety of our staff, fellow lawmakers and members of the public who visit Legislative Hall when we are in session," Rep. Schwartzkopf and Sen. McBride said in a joint statement.

"At this moment, our postponement will extend until March 24. However, we will carefully monitor the spread of COVID-19 in Delaware and across the country, and we will re-evaluate when to return to session on a weekly basis. As we have said before, this is a rapidly shifting situation and we must remain flexible based on the changing circumstances."

Effective Friday, Legislative Hall will be closed to the public. There will be no tours, and any meetings scheduled for the following week will also be postponed.

Approximately 600 people – staff, legislators, lobbyists, press and members of the public – visit Legislative Hall on an average session day. This far exceeds the 250-person guideline recommended by public health officials. Experts also are recommending that people practice social distancing, which is a difficult proposition in a building such as Legislative Hall.

Missed session days are not unprecedented. In the past, the General Assembly has canceled a limited number of session days due to inclement weather. These missed days will be treated in a similar fashion. Discussions about how to proceed with the remainder of session will be ongoing and developing as the situation unfolds.