

# New Rules Inhibit Public Attendance at Council Meetings

After weeks of confusion, [written rules for public attendance](#) at Chicago City Council meetings have been published on the City Clerk's website.

The Better Government Association believes the new rules violate the spirit and likely the letter of the state's Open Meetings Act and calls on city government to reverse these changes.

The new rules discourage public participation in council meetings, and the City Council's longstanding rules provided for safety and decorum at council meetings if responsibly enforced by the Council Sergeant-at-Arms.

The new rules were not voted on by the City Council, which means they may violate the Open Meetings Act, which requires public bodies to vote on rules governing access. The Act guards the public's rights to attend, record and address public officials face-to-face during meetings of governmental bodies.

Under the new City Council rules, access to the second floor gallery-adjacent to where council meets-would require a reservation made at least 48 hours in advance, with admission only to people who present government-issued identification. Requiring registration for the meeting of a public body is a highly unusual step, virtually unheard of in Illinois.

Other attendees would be shunted to the third-floor gallery, which overhangs the area where most alderpeople sit, putting them out of the public's line of sight. That gallery also is enclosed in glass, making public input from it virtually inaudible on the City Council floor.

Microphones needed for public comment would be moved to the third-floor gallery, where speakers' natural voices would not be audible through the glass windows rimming the front of that gallery.

The requirement for 48-hour advance registration is impractical for meetings called on short notice.

In a time where important matters are being discussed, the public is entitled to

open access to our government. Access rules that have been in effect for years comply with the Open Meetings Act and allow for public participation in the democratic process, in a safe and decorous environment if reasonably and professionally enforced.

BGA Policy notes Mayor Brandon Johnson's background as a progressive and calls on him to exercise leadership to protect open meetings so residents of Chicago can hold their government accountable.

BGA Policy is reviewing whether the new rules comply with the Open Meetings Act and stands ready to advise the city on acceptable revision of access rules, if in fact any change is needed.

*The Better Government Association is a 100-year-old civic watchdog that seeks better government through investigative journalism, policy reforms and civic engagement efforts that lead to more open, equitable and accountable government. The policy team and investigative unit operate independently of one another, while both seek to advance the cause of better government in Chicago and across Illinois.*