

Directed Public Access at the W.Va. State Capitol: Questions & Answers

Q: What has changed for visitors to the West Virginia State Capitol?

A: The West Virginia State Capitol building, also known as the main building and Building 1 of the State Capitol Complex, now features directed public access points. Anyone without an electronic access card for this building must pass through an access point to enter.

Q: Where are these access points?

The access points are located at the wheelchair-accessible entrances for each wing of the building. The East Wing access point entrance is along California Avenue. The West Wing access point entrance is opposite the Culture Center.

The West Wing entrance is the Capitol's closest entrance to the metered public parking north of the West Virginia Veterans Memorial. It also the closest entrance to the new turnaround loop that is used by the parking shuttles and for visitor drop-offs and pick-ups.

To accommodate visitors, these doorways are entrance-only when the directed public access points are in operation.

Q: When are the access points in operation?

The directed public access points operate whenever the building is open to the public: Monday-Friday, 7:45 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; and Sunday and holidays, noon to 5:30 p.m.

Access point hours will be adjusted when necessary to accommodate state government meetings. For meetings scheduled at or after 5:30 p.m., for example, the access points will remain open for a half-hour after the meeting starts.

Q: What is the process for entering through an access point?

A: The directed public access point process is similar to that for other buildings on the State Capitol campus. All visitors will be screened for prohibited items at an access point. Visitors will be screened by a magnetometer, and will place items on their persons in provided containers for inspection. Briefcases, purses, backpacks, packages and the like will be screened by an X-ray machine.

Q: Who must pass through an access point to enter the State Capitol?

A: Anyone without an electronic access card provided by the Division of Protective Services (Capitol Police) for the State Capitol (Building 1). That includes members of the public, people making deliveries, contractors, vendors, and media who do not have designated office space in the Capitol Press Room.

Q: What is the reason for this change?

A: The State Capitol is the seat of West Virginia's elected government. Representatives of all three branches – the Legislature, the Supreme Court, and the constitutional officers of the executive branch – have advocated for these reasonable measures to ensure the safety of state employees and the general public. The screening process upholds an existing prohibition of weapons, contraband and other materials that may be harmful to people or cause damage to property.

Q: What will happen to the other entrances to the Capitol?

A: All other entrances to the main State Capitol building will remain locked electronically. Propping open these entrances will be strictly prohibited, as is allowing anyone to bypass an access point.

Q: I am a state employee with an electronic access card. Can I continue to use my card to enter the State Capitol?

A: Yes. Holders of electronic access cards for the main State Capitol are encouraged to use them to enter any of the other entrances to the building.

Please note: even access card holders will be required to go through the screening process if they enter through an access point while it is in operation. Employees who use the complex parking garage, for instance, could enter the West Wing through the North Plaza (courtyard circle) as an alternative to the access point.

When the access points are not in operations, card holders can still use those doorways.

Q: Can I lend my electronic access card to someone else so they can get into the building?

A: No. Electronic access cards provided by the Capitol Police are valid only for the individual to whom it is issued. Allowing others to use the card or “tailgate” when the card holder enters the building is strictly prohibited. When entering the building using an electronic access card, individuals should ensure the door locks securely behind them. Any violation of this safety policy should be reported immediately to the Capitol Police. Violations of this policy can result in the revocation of an access card.

Q: I am a contractor or vendor. Can I still use one of the building’s loading docks?

A: Case-by-case access to the loading docks will continue. Loading dock access is requested through the Division of Protective Service’s Command Center ahead of time by the receiving state agency. Contractors or vendors will be met and screened at the loading dock. Items requiring additional screening will be taken to an access point.

Q: What constitutes a prohibited item?

A: Items are prohibited if it appears they pose a risk to people or property. Prohibited items include dangerous weapons as defined by §61-7-2 of the W.Va. State Code. This definition includes:

- Blackjack or billy club-style weapon;
- Various categories of knives;
- Brass knuckle-type devices;
- Firearms;
- Drugs and controlled substances.

The definition is available online:

<http://www.legis.state.wv.us/WVCODE/ChapterEntire.cfm?chap=61&art=7§ion=2#07>

Other prohibited items include such defensive weapons as mace and pepper spray.

Q: I have a permit to carry a concealed weapon. Can I carry a weapon into the State Capitol?

A: No. W.Va. Code §61-6-19 prohibits the carrying of weapons into the State Capitol building. That language is available online:
<http://www.legis.state.wv.us/WVCODE/ChapterEntire.cfm?chap=61&art=6§ion=19&year=2015&sessiontype=RS&btype=bill&input=2120>

Weapons may be carried by federal, state, or local law enforcement officers or security personnel who, because of the nature of their work, are duly authorized to possess a firearm while engaged in their official capacity.

Q: What happens if I am found with a prohibited item during an access point screening?

A: You will not be allowed to enter the building with the item. Access point personnel will not store, confiscate or otherwise dispose of prohibited items; that will be the responsibility of the individual carrying them.

Everyone subject to the access point screening process is urged to apply common sense and remain mindful of this policy before reaching the State Capitol Complex. Individuals should leave potentially prohibited items at home or in their vehicles, for instance.