



January 8, 2019

Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins
Capitol Building
Albany, N.Y. 12247

Assembly Speaker Heastie
Capitol Building
Albany, N.Y. 12248

Senate Minority Leader Flanagan
Legislative Office Building
Albany, NY 12247

Assembly Minority Leader Kolb
Legislative Office Building
Albany, N.Y. 12248

Re: Rules Reforms

Dear Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Speaker Heastie, Senate Minority Leader Flanagan, and Assembly Minority Leader Kolb:

Congratulations on your selections to lead your respective conferences. We write on behalf of our organizations to urge that you reform the rules governing the proceedings and operations of the legislature.

Democracy demands public participation in public policy decision-making. Backroom dealing and secrecy undermine public confidence and breed public cynicism and apathy. Central to all policymaking are rules by which legislatures decide what to do.

Public confidence in the rules that govern the legislative process is a cornerstone in public support for lawmaking. Public distrust of the legislative process erodes democracy.

We are well aware that you are poised to act to establish rules for your respective houses. We urge that after such action, you create committees to review those rules and consider changes in an open and public manner.

In the past, our groups call for four main changes: (1) increase the strength and efficiency of committees, so that they function fully and effectively; (2) provide greater opportunity for rank and file members to bring legislation with majority support to the floor, even over the objection of leadership; (3) institute more equitable allocation of resources between all of the conferences; and (4) increase transparency in the chamber.

More specifically, we have in the past strongly urged consideration of the following changes to legislative procedures:

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1. Increase the strength and efficiency of committees by
 - a. Reducing the number of standing committees, and the number upon which members can sit;
 - b. Allowing Senate members to vote in committee only if they are physically present;
 - c. Requiring a public reading and mark up process for bills before they can be passed through committee; and
 - e. Requiring that all bills that pass out of committee include reports that set forth the purpose of the bill, proposed changes to existing law, a section-by-section explanation of the bill, a cost-benefit-analysis, the bill's procedural and voting history, and any individual members' comments on the bill.
2. Encourage greater participation by all legislators by providing the opportunity for a significant number of members to bring any bill to the floor for consideration and a vote, regardless of leadership objections.
3. Foster equity and comity through the fair allocation of resources between the majority and minority parties by ensuring that funding for central staff is proportionate to a conference's size and tightening rules prohibiting the use of resources for political purposes.
4. Increase transparency by making access to information on the Legislative Retrieval Service free and following through with the creation of the State Government Public Affairs Channel (often referred to as "NYSPAN").

When you convene for the first time in January and adopts new operating rules, you will have a tremendous opportunity to send a signal to New Yorkers about your commitment to making the legislature more representative, deliberative, accountable and efficient bodies. We hope that you will establish an ongoing public process to further strengthen the rules of the legislature. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss them with you in greater detail in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,

Betsy Gotbaum
Citizens Union of the City of New York

Susan Lerner
Common Cause of New York

Laura Ladd-Bierman
League of Women Voters/NYS

Blair Horner
NYPIRG

John Kaehny
Reinvent Albany