

Finally, we were disappointed to see that several reforms proposed by Senator Bonacic and others that would have increased the power of rank and file members, as well as provide additional transparency and accountability, were left out.

We reiterate our suggestions to reform the committee process:

1. Consolidate committees to reduce their number and ensure that individual Senators serve on no more than three, as is typical in other state legislatures (including such large states as California, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania);
2. Eliminate proxy voting in all committees by prohibiting members from casting absentee votes on official voting sheets delivered to the committee chair;
3. Require committee reports issued with any bill voted out of committee to set forth the purpose of the bill, the proposed changes to existing law, section-by-section analysis, the bill's procedural history, committee or subcommittee votes, any individual members' comments on the bill, and organizations which support and oppose the bill;
4. Require a process for reading, debating and amending any bill before it receives a vote from the committee, unless a majority of committee members vote to forego that process for a particular bill;
5. Strengthen the ability of committee chairs to control the committee budget and make hiring and firing decisions; and
6. Institutionalize conference committees, so that when bills addressing the same subject have been passed by both chambers, a conference committee will be convened at the request of the prime sponsor from each chamber or the Speaker and Majority Leader.

These suggested changes are not intended to benefit any individual or party. They are intended to improve the functioning of the Senate as a democratic legislative body, so that it may conduct the people's business in a more responsible, open, and transparent way. We urge you to include these suggestions during the next Rules Committee meeting and on the floor, and to openly debate them in both proceedings. To the extent that members do not or cannot support them, we urge them to provide a public explanation for their opposition.

Sincerely,

Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law
Citizens Union
Common Cause/NY
The League of Women Voters of New York State
New York Public Interest Research Group