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No Reason to Wait: Senator Krueger & Senate Democrats Introduce Sweeping Bipartisan Rules Reforms

By *Liz Krueger*

Posted by [Liz Krueger](#) [1] on Wednesday, January 19th, 2011

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(Albany, NY) Building on their commitment to immediately adopt Mayor Koch's reform pledge for independent redistricting, ethics and budget reform, Senator Liz Krueger (D-Manhattan) Senate Democrats called on all 62 members to join them in immediately passing a sweeping rules reform resolution that would protect historic reforms passed in the Senate in 2009, and take additional proposals from both Republicans and Democrats to create a more fair, deliberative, and accountable Senate.

The additional rules changes proposed in the resolution sponsored by Senator Liz Krueger and co-sponsored by Senator Daniel Squadron, grow out of the recommendations issued by the bipartisan Temporary Committee on Rules and Administration Reform, as well as a Senate Republican report. By drastically amending the rules through an equitable balance of resources, increased transparency, and a more inclusive legislative process, all 62 Senators will be empowered to better serve their constituents.

Currently, rules from the past legislative session have been temporarily extended; with the budget process about to begin it is vital that changes be fully debated and adopted well in advance of the Executive's budget introduction in just two weeks.

Key among the proposed rules changes are:

- Equal staff allocations, resources, and members item initiatives for all Senators;
- Requiring legislative leaders of the Senate and Assembly to convene conference committees, as opposed to current Joint Rule which authorizes – but does not require; and

- Changes to the number of standing committees, the rules governing the introduction of legislation through the committee process, and public notification of legislation.

Senator Liz Krueger said, "I was pleased that in 2009 for the first time, the Senate adopted substantially improved rules with bipartisan support, but these changes were just a down payment on the more fundamental reforms I propose today. These changes will foster and enable deliberative conversations, enable committees to become useful vehicles for developing critical legislation, and ensure that all New Yorkers have access to the same resources regardless of the party of their Senator. These new rules will change the way business is done in Albany - finally allowing the people's business to get done."

Senator Daniel Squadron said, "There should be no doubt: a more functional and more transparent State Senate will be better prepared to tackle the serious issues facing New York in the year to come. Last session, we enacted new rules that made the Senate more open, more transparent and more accountable--and many of us on both sides of the aisle agreed we should go even farther. Now, Senator Krueger, Senator Bonacic, colleagues from both parties and I have proposed deeper changes to create a more equitable body, stronger committees and a reformed member item process. We should join forces to implement them together."

Senate Democratic Conference Leader John L. Sampson said, "Too often in Albany, promises of reform go from now to never, and nothing gets done. To move our state forward, we must continue to improve the rules of the Senate and empower all members with an equal opportunity to better serve our constituents. Creating a more fair, open, and bipartisan legislative process responsive to the needs of the people is what government and good government should be about."

Democratic Deputy Leader Neil D. Breslin (D-Delmar) said, "Last session Senate Democrats began the process of bringing real reform to Albany by enacting the most significant rules changes ever. We must maintain that commitment by not only keeping the existing rules changes in place, but also work in a bi-partisan manner to make even more reforms to further improve the operation of the chamber."

Senator Malcolm A. Smith (D-St. Albans) said, "The reforms passed last year allow for greater accountability and more bipartisanship than ever before in the history of the New York State Senate. It is essential that we continue to operate in a bipartisan manner. We must make the chamber more transparent for all New Yorkers and we must maintain and regain the public's trust. We have a duty as elected officials to do what is right for the constituents that we serve."

Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins (35th District-D/WF/I) said, "This package streamlines the State Senate's operations, creates greater transparency and calls for equitable allocation of resources among Senators. With these rules in place, we can move forward on our priorities, which are creating jobs, providing tax relief and cleaning up State government, in an environment that better represents the people of New York. We must pass these rules reforms so that New Yorkers can have the government that they deserve."

Senator Timothy M. Kennedy (D-Western New York) said, "Albany needs to stop letting perceived political differences hinder public servants' ability to serve their constituents. These rules reforms would be a positive step toward making Albany a place where all leaders – Democrat and Republican, Upstate

and Downstate – work together to tackle the challenges facing New York – reducing the tax burden on middle class families and businesses, sparking job growth, closing the budget gap – rather than perpetuating the negative trends of partisan bickering and political retaliation. Hardworking New Yorkers are building a rising momentum for change that is too great to ignore. It's time to heed their call. I hope our colleagues will join us in our fight to change Albany.”

Senator Gustavo Rivera (D-Bronx) said, “I was elected by the people of the Bronx to work to clean up Albany. That is why I feel so strongly that we must change the very rules that have allowed politicians to get away with coups, power plays and shady backroom deals behind the backs of the very people they are suppose to represent. The only way we are going to restore the New Yorkers’ faith in their legislators is through real government reform that promotes transparency, holds elected officials accountable to their constituents and rejects a culture that is focused on gaining power and spoils instead of on how to solve the problems facing New Yorkers.”

Senator Michael Gianaris (D-Queens) said, “For too long campaign promises of reform, accountability and transparency have been pushed aside once governing begins. The only way to truly change Albany is to change the way we govern. Our focus should be on what is best for our diverse constituents not for our fellow politicians and special interests.”

Senator José M. Serrano (D-Bronx/Manhattan) said, “I’m extremely proud of the work we have been able to do during my time on the Temporary Senate Committee on Rules and Administration Reform. The Democratic Conference took steps, while in the Majority, to make the Senate more equal, accountable and open for the greater good of our state. The changes we implemented gave rank and file members from both sides of the aisle the opportunity to have their voices heard and produced a more democratic Chamber. After taking those important first steps, we must continue to work in a bipartisan fashion to implement reforms that will equally benefit all New Yorkers.”

Senator Adriano Espaillat (D-Manhattan/Bronx) said, “New Yorkers play by the rules and they expect their legislators to do the same. The Senate must adhere to reforms that have already been enacted. Additionally, we must institute rules that empower individual law makers, provide adequate resources to senators from both parties, and stop the "one party takes all" system that is both ineffective and unjust.”

Summary of Rules Reform Resolution (22-point plan)

- Establish equal staff allocations for all Senators, with supplements for chairs and rankers, with ranking minority member supplement equal to 50 percent of chair supplement. (Most states have equal allocations for all Senators, regardless of party affiliation).
- Provide equal access to resources for all Senators.
- Mandate equal member item initiative allocations for all Senators, and a ban on member item initiative funding for any organization where the Senator or family member serves as a board member or officer.
- Establish a nonpartisan administrative staff of the Senate.
- Create a proportionate ratio for central staff based on conference membership – compared to current system.

- Require legislative leaders of the Senate and Assembly to convene conference committees, as opposed to the current Joint Rule which authorizes – but does not require it – and also allow the sponsor or chair of committee of origin to call conference committees.
- Reduce the number of committees from 32 to 23 and change membership so all committees have an odd number of members, to encourage more active participation by committee members.
- Reduce maximum number of committees per Senator from seven to five.
- Eliminate the ability of a committee to introduce a bill, so all bills will be identified as sponsored by a specific Senator.
- Allow ranking minority members or a majority of committee members to call committee hearings.
- Require members to be present at the committee meeting to cast committee votes.
- Increase the requirements for reports on bills coming out of committee to include purpose of the bill, the proposed changes to existing law, section-by-section analysis, fiscal impacts, the bill's procedural history, committee or subcommittee votes, any individual member's comments on the bill, and organizations which support and oppose the bill.
- Require active lists to be published 24 hours before session, and prohibit supplemental active lists without unanimous consent.
- Eliminate the Committee on Rules' ability to consider bills without being on a printed agenda for 24 hours unless they come with messages from Governor.
- Require bills amended with hostile amendments on the floor retain their place on the third reading calendar.
- Reduce the number of members required to support a Petition for Consideration on the floor from three-fifths to a majority.
- Eliminate the ability to vote aye without recommendation on bills in committee.
- Require committee votes on whether to conduct a hearing or mark-up before a bill is reported out of committee.
- Explicitly ensure that chairs and ranking members have full power to hire and fire committee staff.
- Require that committee budgets and member staff allocations be completely transparent and published on the Senate website.
- Require that after a hostile amendment, a bill on the calendar move to first reading.
- Require Senate leadership to request conference committees to reconcile similar bills passed in both the Senate and the Assembly, including budget bills.

Related information

Senator:

[Liz Krueger](#) ^[1]

Authored by Senator

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