

Session Standing Committees

Prepared for the Legislative Council
May, 2014

Attached to this memo are charts for the House and Senate that give historical statistics for the number of assigned bills and committee members in previous sessions. The Council may decide to use this information to make recommendations to the 2015 legislative leadership on the scheduling of standing committees or the number of members to appoint to each committee.

Considerations

2015 is a reappraisal cycle. In looking at the bills assigned to Senate Taxation, you can see that in 2003, 105 bills were assigned to Senate Tax. In 2009, Senate Tax was assigned 89 bills because there was also a Joint Select Committee on Reappraisal. You may want to consider whether you need a Joint Select Committee on Reappraisal for 2015. Last session, Senate Tax was assigned only 77 bills, but many tax bills were assigned to House Appropriations, which may have contributed to the increase in House Appropriations numbers and to the decline in Senate Tax numbers.

In a survey of standing committee staff, the following comments were made:

Committee class

- House Local Government did a good job filling its time as a class 3 committee. I do, however, note that it got more bills than any other House class 3 committee and more than two other class 2 committees, leaving only two class 3 committees that received bills more than it. It does seem to consistently get more bills than Federal Energy & Telecom (a class 2 committee). So, just looking at the number of bills that we get and the large committee size, it could be bumped up to a class 2 and displace one of the lower (number of bills) class 2 committees. In addition, since the Senate Local Government committee is a class 2, it would make sense to bump it up. Last year it did perform well as a class 3 committee primarily because the chair used time wisely and was able to space the bills appropriately.
- My main recommendation for a change would be to try House Fish and Game as a Class 2 committee. This committee typically runs past 5 p.m. and often past 6. There is often a lot of public comment and people come from a long ways to comment.

Number of members

- Senate Taxation. Class 1 is appropriate. Last session there were some large policy bills that took a considerable amount of time (3 simplify income tax bills and reappraisal), and the revenue estimate (SJ 2) also took up some time. The size of the committee made it a cramped room when everyone attended, so I would not increase the size without considering another room (or modifications to the seating).

Room accommodation

- House State Administration's meeting room, 455, has always been a problem . . . just too small to be very comfortable considering the amount of time we have to spend in it. Of course, it probably doesn't get as many interested persons in the audience as some smaller committees, except on a few bills a session that will draw a crowd. So, that should also be a consideration for the room size.
- For the last two sessions, Senate Natural Resources has had an extremely difficult time fitting in Room 422. It is almost a relief when a member misses a meeting, simply because it opens up some space at the table. In 2013, our secretary and Senator Phillips had an ongoing battle over laptop space. Folks who wish to testify on a bill also must wait in the hallway until their bill comes up as there is no additional seating. The committee loses time shuffling one group in and another group out the door. On controversial bills, staff and secretaries scramble to find a larger room -- with limited success.
- As for rooms, last session House Natural Resources was again placed on the 4th floor as it was the previous two sessions. In 2005, we were in room 152. Chairman Bennett was in his third term on the committee and knew that the 4th floor room was often packed and much time was wasted cycling people in and out for different topics. Again, the committee attracts large crowds from a long ways off. We switched with FRET for room 172 and that seemed to work out better for everyone. I'd suggest HNR continue in a first floor room.
- House Human Services needs to remain in a first-floor room (Rm 152) for accessibility reasons for persons with disabilities.
- Senate Ag has been in Room 335 all three sessions that I staffed it, and I'd have to say that the room is often cramped for the number of people who show up on some of the ag-related bills. If there were a room with more space for the public, it would be nice to have a different hearing room.

Security

- Senate Judiciary. My only concern has to do with security. With the balcony, the

legislators and staff are pretty exposed. It might be helpful to have the capitol officer do a few rounds through the balcony every morning. I do see him up there sometimes so this may already be happening.

All is well

- I think Senate Ed staying Class 2 is appropriate. The number of bills may be smaller than other Class 2's, but the complexity of school funding, etc., and the emotion/contention makes for longer hearings . . . And I loved meeting in 303!
- The House Local Government had a lot of committee members last year, which worked out well, since it seems to be a less divisive committee than others, and the number of members assisted with debate. We had a large committee room, which was also appropriate, mostly because of the number of members on the committee that had to be accommodated and the committee got a lot of local lobbyist interest on the bigger bills.
- House State Administration should probably remain Class 1 with between 17 and 19 members.
- Senate Energy generally met past 5 on only a few occasions when the Senate was running late or there was a controversial bill. Senate Natural Resources went until 6 or so about once a week, but the committee members seemed to understand the circumstances. They also opted to go short a couple Fridays, so they were willing to sit longer earlier in the week.
- Senate Local Government. Even though the number of assigned bills has decreased, I still think it is appropriate for it to be Class 2. And the committee has seemed comfortable with that designation since it was changed a few sessions ago.
- Both committees were in the right category -- Class 2 for House Human Services and Class 3 for Senate Ag. We rarely had late meetings, and when that happened, it was because of bills backed up or delayed executive action until we were up against deadlines.
- House Transportation met in room 455 on M, W, & F. That seemed to be the right class/frequency for the workload. The space in 455 is, of course, tight but Highways and Transportation don't draw much public (at least they didn't last session).

Other ideas

- More Class 3 Committees, especially House, (meet 10 a.m.- noon) or a new class of committees to meet M, W, F, S.
- Assignment of bills to committee.
- Use of Saturdays for committees to complete work, catch up, or hold controversial hearings.
- More coaching or guidance (rules?) for committee chairs on scheduling and acting upon

- bills: scheduled within X days of assignment, X days between hearing and exec. action
- Change Joint Rules that if a bill draft request is placed on "HOLD" status and remains in that status for more than XX days prior to session or Y days after the session convenes, the bill draft would be cancelled. Such a rule change would directly address the concern that many big, complex bills aren't drafted/introduced until late in the session.
 - Change the Joint Rules to limit the number of bill draft requests any legislator may have drafted, thereby forcing legislators to prioritize among the numerous "place holders" to 10 bills per legislator (1,500 bills total), 15 bills per legislator (2,250 bills total)? This is a modification, of sorts, to the "first 5 drafts" drafting rule.
 - Change the Joint Rules to require that any bill draft request made prior to [DATE] must include sufficient information for the drafter to complete a draft suitable for introduction by [DATE]; e.g., a request made prior to Labor Day 2014 must have all of the necessary information/approvals by October 1? November 1?

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