

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE MODERNIZATION OF CONGRESS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
“THE HOUSE CALENDAR AND SCHEDULE: EVALUATING PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES”
OCTOBER 16, 2019

In 2000, NCSL conducted a study of the Virginia legislative process. We are in session 60 calendar days in even years starting the second Wednesday in January and 45 calendar days in odd years starting the second Wednesday in January. We consider approximately 3,000 pieces of legislation during that time with an average of 900 pieces of legislation enacted into law.

In the 1970's, the General Assembly enacted a procedural resolution (Joint Rules) with scheduling deadlines for limits on bill consideration by committee or Chamber. This kept the process flowing.

In the Senate, bills are referred to committee by the Clerk and once a bill is reported out, it goes on to the calendar as either contested or uncontested. There is no subcommittee or leadership action in committee referrals or placement on the calendar.

One major change from the NCSL study was to allow members to sign on as patrons electronically. In addition, they have the option to sign on or remove their name up until the first vote on passage.

In the 1970's, the Rules reduced the number of standing committees to 10. They were given specific times and days to meet - for example, the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources meets at 9:00 am on Monday. Any additional meetings must be approved by the Chair of the Senate Rules Committee. Committees may **not** meet during the floor sessions and members **must** be present when the Senate is in session unless the body grants permission for absence due to pressing personal business.

Senate sessions are streamed over the internet and are on public TV in Richmond for two hours.

Three years ago, the Senate began streaming one committee to launch our committee streaming project. It was well received by the public and lobbyist communities. Now all standing committees are streamed as well as legislative commissions, if requested by the Chair of that group. We were able to eliminate 3 session positions and cut the time to process committee reports by 75%.

Electronic voting in committee has had a major impact in streamlining the process. We designed our committee voting system to follow our committee process and to mimic our paper process as closely as possible. We spent time going over our process and found that our process could be improved with technology. The biggest hurdle was the proxy system. In the Senate of Virginia, after a Senator is present at a meeting, they can give their vote to another member of the committee via a proxy. This had previously been done by a 5-part paper form. Another problem with the rules of a proxy is that they are not transferable, meaning if a Senator who holds proxies leaves a meeting, another Senator cannot then vote. Our system takes all this into consideration. It shows the Chairman and the Committee Clerk the status of all proxies in real time as a meeting progresses. The public is shown that a Senator is being voted by proxy by a " P" showing on our voting boards beside the Senator ' s name. The System also logs all votes and votes by proxy so the Committee Clerk can reference this information after a meeting if there is ever a question about a particular vote or proxy. In the event of a Senator leaving a meeting while holding another Senator's proxy, the Senator who will no longer be able to vote's name is shown in red so that all parties know that Senator is no longer voting either in person or by proxy. If the proxy holder or the Senators themselves return to the meeting, all votes are re-enabled.

Another simple but effective part of the system are the timers. The committee chair has the ability to enforce time limits for testimony. The system shows the timer on all displays in the room and all the voting stations for each member of the committee. The timer shows the presenter a time and the system shows an amber indicator at 30 seconds and a blinking red indication when the time is up. The system also counts any overage of time so that it can be given to other speakers, if necessary.

We are investigating using our voting technology to send individual Senators messages from the Chamber Desk or Committee Clerk, to send motion language or give an indicator that the member's bill is on the board for debate. This would apply to both committee meetings and the Senate Chamber.

We are investigating using automatic camera technology to better automate our session and committee streaming. We are already using this technology in committee but are investigating use in the Chamber. We would be able to automatically show all the bill information and who is speaking without having a video operator.

Currently we are working with other legislative agencies to clean up the way we communication with DLAS and rebuild the system so that information is only entered once, eliminating the many proofing steps.