

Roberta Manter  
Fayette  
LD 1563

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, members of the Committee on State and Local Government,

My name is Roberta Manter and I live in Fayette. I am writing to urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD LD 1563, An Act to Establish Content Standards for Legislation.

First, let me state that I agree with those who have already testified in favor of this bill. I would also add that the title of the bill should accurately reflect not only the subject of the bill, but what it proposes to accomplish.

I believe in being involved with the legislative process, so I subscribe to notifications from a number of Committees. As a consequence, it takes me some time to go through all the notifications. I find it extremely frustrating when I see a bill with a title such as, "An Act to Amend the Motor Vehicle Laws." What on earth is that supposed to mean? Which motor vehicle law will it amend, and in what way will it amend it? Imagine if you walked into a grocery store and found that the labels on the cans simply said, "Food." What kind of food? Canned peaches? Brussels Sprouts? Perhaps dog food? Or does it contain peanuts, and I was trying to buy food for my child who has a life-threatening peanut allergy? In the same way, the label on a bill should give the reader some idea if the contents of the bill are going to be something they want to support, or something to which they are vehemently opposed.

Worse yet, there are bill titles that seem to be intentionally worded to mean the opposite of what they appear to mean. Using the food analogy once again, what would happen if a product labeled "Health food" was based on the seller's belief that high levels of sugar boost your mood, which must be good for your health? Or if a product labeled "reduced fat" indicated that it was a replacement for an earlier version of the product which consisted of 100% fat? People's views differ, but the title of a bill should reflect the facts, not the presenter's attempt to throw opponents off the trail. To give an example of a subject that is dear to my heart, I could propose a bill entitled, "An Act to Assure Persons with Low Income Equal Access to Emergency Services," to hide the fact that the actual goal of the bill was to force towns to bring discontinued roads up to full town road standards.

As for "concept drafts," we depend on our elected representatives to speak for us and to support or oppose legislation their constituents would support or oppose. How can they possibly do that when they do not know the content of a bill until the last minute? And how can we as good citizens speak up for or against a bill if we do not have sufficient notice of what is being put forward? When I see that a bill has been presented as a concept draft, I can only guess that it means one of two things: 1) The bill's presenter was ill prepared to present the legislation and should have waited until they could express at least some idea of what they wanted the bill to accomplish, knowing it could be amended to perfect it before or during the work session. Or 2) They knew perfectly well what they were going to propose, but preferred no one else knew until it was too late to prepare a sufficient objection. I have seen the latter circumstance play out all too often. That is no way to foster trust in our government. Please restore this measure of government transparency by voting LD 1563 "Ought to Pass."