



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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*Testimony of Representative Morgan Rielly introducing*

## **LD 1577, Resolve, to Establish the Commission to Study and Recommend Solutions for Modernizing the Maine Legislature**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government*

Good morning Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Affairs. I am Morgan Rielly, and I represent House District 127, which includes part of Westbrook. Thank you for the opportunity to introduce **LD 1577, Resolve, to Establish the Commission to Study and Recommend Solutions for Modernizing the Maine Legislature** for your consideration.

I think we all can agree – Democrats and Republicans, partisan and nonpartisan staff – that the Maine Legislature desperately needs to be modernized. We might have different ideas of how this should be accomplished or reasons why we think change is necessary. At the end of the day, the people of Maine deserve a more transparent, a more efficient and a more modern Legislature.

Now in my third term, I have noticed some trends in inefficiencies and aspects of the Legislature that need to be addressed.

Despite our recent pay increase, the low-pay and time commitment presents a serious barrier for Mainers who would like to serve in the Maine Legislature. This cuts out many qualified people and leads to an overrepresentation of retirees or individuals who have the financial means to serve. From my own experience, this has made serving in the Legislature incredibly difficult. Employers typically aren't thrilled knowing that you will be up in the State House four to five days out of the week for half of the year. I've waited tables while in session and have primarily worked seasonal jobs, like out on the water on oyster farms. I don't have a family that is relying on me, but if I did, I would never be able to serve.

The Maine Legislature has to have serious conversations about moving towards a more professional year-round Legislature with a livable salary. I think this could be accomplished by shrinking the size of the House and Senate or having a unicameral body, which can help cover the cost in increasing pay. In turn, this will also lead to fewer but more significant bill proposals.

We also need to have conversations about the influence of the lobby and the need for better oversight of state agencies. I see the Legislature as being over reliant on lobbyists and special interest groups to provide institutional knowledge and assistance. That does not bode well for our democracy and leads to policy driven by outside interests that might not always be reflective of what voters see as priorities.

The lack of staff, especially in our nonpartisan offices, along with our constrained session timelines, leads to most work being done at the very end of session. This results in rushed work, which ends with good policy dying and bad policy that needs more work being passed. The current status quo isn't efficient. We need to have a serious discussion on how to make this process better.

These are just some of the many reasons why I have introduced this legislation. By bringing stakeholders together to study and recommend solutions for modernizing the Legislature, I believe we will be able to establish some consensus that the whole body can be in support of.

I have included an amendment to my bill that will add two working groups, one for the public and one for nonpartisan staff, in addition to the legislative commission. I ask the committee to include the original duties I have laid out in my bill in addition to the ones in the proposed amendment because not all of them are included.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I'm happy to answer any questions or provide any further information for the work session.

**Resolve, to Establish the Commission to Study and Recommend Solutions for Modernizing and Improving the Effectiveness of the Maine Legislature**

**Emergency preamble.** Whereas, acts and resolves of the Legislature do not become effective until 90 days after adjournment unless enacted as emergencies; and

**Whereas,** this resolve establishes the Commission to Study and Recommend Solutions for Modernizing the Operations of the Maine Legislature; and

**Whereas,** the effective and efficient functioning of the Legislature is essential to the health, safety and welfare of the citizens and economy of the State; and

**Whereas,** the study must be initiated before the 90-day period expires in order that the study may be completed and a report submitted in time for submission to the next legislative session; and

**Whereas,** in the judgment of the Legislature, these facts create an emergency within the meaning of the Constitution of Maine and require the following legislation as immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety; now, therefore, be it

**Sec. 1. Commission established. Resolved:** That, the Commission to Study and Recommend Solutions for Modernizing and Improving the Effectiveness of the Maine Legislature, referred to in this resolve as "the commission," is established.

**Sec. 2. Commission membership. Resolved:** That, the commission shall consist of 8 members as follows:

1. Four members of the Senate, appointed by the President of the Senate, 2 of whom are from the party holding the largest number of seats in the Legislature and 2 of whom are from the party holding the 2nd largest number of seats in the Legislature; and
2. Four members of the House of Representatives, appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, 2 of whom are from the party holding the largest number of seats in the Legislature and 2 of whom are from the party holding the 2nd largest number of seats in the Legislature.

**Sec. 3. Chairs. Resolved:** That, the first appointed Senate members is the Senate Chair and the first appointed House of Representatives member is the House chair of the Commission.

**Sec. 4. Working Groups. Resolved:** That, notwithstanding Joint Rule 353, the commission shall be supported by two working groups as follows:

1. **Nonpartisan Staff Working Group.** This working group is established to work in coordination with the commission to identify, study and report to the commission relevant findings and recommendations regarding best practices and ideas on modernizing and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Maine Legislature. The nonpartisan staff working group shall consist of the following members:

- A. The Executive Director of the Legislative Council or the executive director's designee;
  - B. The Director of the Office of Policy and Legal Analysis or the director's designee;
  - C. The Director of the Office of Fiscal and Program Review of the director's designee;
  - D. The Director of the Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability or the director's designee;
  - E. The Clerk of the House of Representatives; and
  - F. The Secretary of the Senate.
2. **Public Citizen Working Group.** This working group is established to work in coordination with the commission to gather input from the general public. The working group shall consist of up to 8 members, 2 of whom are appointed by the President of the Senate, 2 of whom are appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, 2 of whom are appointed by the Senate Minority Leader, and 2 of whom are appointed by the House Minority Leader. The members appointed to the public citizen working group shall reflect the geographic, demographic and occupational diversity of the State, and shall have knowledge and expertise in public policy, government relations, legal scholarship, political science, civic engagement, municipal government, private business, and organized labor. In carrying out its duties, the public citizen working group shall:
- A. Convene at least 5 public meetings in diverse locations across the state;
  - B. Solicit and receive testimony from the general public regarding experiences, ideas and expectations for a modern, efficient and effective legislature; and
  - C. Submit a summary report of findings and recommendations to the commission.

**Sec. 5. Appointments and convening of commission. Resolved:** That, notwithstanding Joint Rule 353, all appointments to the commission and working groups must be made no later than 30 days following the effective date of this resolve. The appointing authorities shall notify the Executive Director of the Legislative Council once all appointments have been completed. After appointment of all members, the chairs shall call and convene the first meeting of the commission. If 30 days or more after the effective date of this resolve a majority of but not all appointments have been made, the chairs may call and convene the first meeting of the commission and begin to conduct its business. The commission shall meet at least monthly and shall allow for remote participation by residents of the State.

**Sec. 6. Duties. Resolved:** That, the commission and working groups shall study the existing structure and operations of the Maine Legislature for the purpose of determining its adequacy and effectiveness, and to identify changes to modernize the Maine Legislature in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness; provide better information to inform decisions; help prioritize legislative activity; develop, implement and coordinate a strategic plan; and reinforce political trust and support in state government. In its work, the commission may consider, but is not limited to:

- 1. Improving efficiencies through technology.
- 2. Increasing transparency in the Legislature.
- 3. Improving physical access; evaluating remote access; and updating facilities for legislators and legislative staff who have children to bring them to work.

4. Evaluating the overall structure of the Legislature, including the size of the Legislature, the benefit of a professional legislature versus a citizen legislature, the benefit of a year-round legislature versus a part-time legislature, and the benefit of a unicameral legislature versus a bicameral legislature.
5. Evaluating the number of terms and the frequency of elections for members of the Legislature.
6. Evaluating the training and education of legislators and legislative staff, including the use of policy research and data in the legislative process.
7. Exploring changes to the legislative staffing structure, including increasing partisan and nonpartisan staffing.
8. Exploring the reorganization of the legislative calendar.
9. Evaluating the process for allowing the introduction of bills (cloture and filing after cloture), including limiting the number of bills in a legislative session and in a legislative biennium.
10. Evaluating the requirements for drafting legislation; evaluating the use of concept draft legislation; and exploring the prioritization of legislation.
11. Evaluating the structure of joint standing committees of the Legislature; evaluating the committee appointment process; evaluating meetings of the joint standing committees of the Legislature; and evaluating the responsibilities and jurisdiction of joint standing committees, including procedures for public hearings and work sessions, scheduling public hearings and work sessions, and the rules for testimony.
12. Evaluating the process for forming and approving the state budget, including participation in budget hearings and work sessions.
13. Evaluating the legislative confirmation process for gubernatorial appointments.
14. Exploring the adoption of a legislative strategic plan, including the inclusion of economic impact statements on legislation.

**Sec. 7. Staff assistance. Resolved:** That, notwithstanding Joint Rule 353, the Legislative Council shall provide necessary staffing services to support both the commission and the working groups.

**Sec. 8. Report. Resolved:** That, no later than December 3, 2025, the commission shall submit a report that includes its findings and a survey of possible solutions for modernizing and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Maine Legislature, including suggested legislation, for presentation to the Second Regular Session of the 132nd Legislature.

**Emergency clause.** In view of the emergency cited in the preamble, this legislation takes effect when approved.

## SUMMARY

This resolve establishes the Commission to Study and Recommend Solutions for Modernizing and Improving the Effectiveness of the Maine Legislature.