

*132<sup>nd</sup> Legislature*  
***Senate of***  
***Maine***  
*Senate District 2*

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**LD 1649, "Resolve, to Establish the Blue Ribbon Commission  
to Study the Operations of the Legislature"**

**Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government  
May 5, 2025**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government:

I am Trey Stewart; and I represent Senate District 2, which includes several communities in Penobscot and Aroostook Counties. I am here today to present LD 1649, "Resolve, to Establish the Blue Ribbon Commission to Study the Operations of the Legislature."

The legislative process is a critical part of creating and enacting public policies, so it is important that it works well for all Mainers and delivers quality results. Yet, it has evolved for over two decades since the last time any study was done of legislative operations. Since that time, we have had the global financial crisis of 2008, the rise of social media, the COVID-19 pandemic and countless other events. This bill seeks to address the perennial issues the legislature continues to grapple with but does so in a way that avoids partisan slants or political backlash. To be clear, as drafted, this bill does not make any changes to current processes or procedures. The bill simply establishes a commission to study ways to modernize and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Maine Legislature and report back to the Second Regular Session of the 132nd Legislature with a survey of possible solutions to a number of elements of legislative procedure, including the size of the Legislature, the number of terms and frequency of elections for members of the Legislature, the number of bills introduced each session, the committee assignment process, the rules for testimony and several others.

Our legislature is populated with hard-working, dedicated Mainers who love the state and put in tremendously long hours considering and managing a workload that has now grown to over 2,000 new bills each term. There is every reason to believe that every legislator here is working to improve things for all Mainers, but there are structural features of the legislative process that make it virtually impossible for even the most well-intentioned people to produce quality results on Maine's biggest stage. Now, more than ever, there is a need for a study of modernizing and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Maine Legislature, just as there is a need to solve important complex problems and set Maine on the road to growth, health, diversity, prosperity and a bright future.

Each year I have been in the Legislature, we have wrestled with a few of the ideas listed in this bill; and each year we have either made small changes or determined that nothing should be changed out of fear that one party will take advantage of the other party or out of fear of the political ramifications that one or any of these changes might have.

These concerns are getting in the way of us having a real dialogue and a thoughtful discussion of these matters and how we operate as a body. From time to time, it is important for any organization to take a step back, press the pause button and do an analysis of what aspects of the organization are working well and brainstorm ways to improve the organization. By putting this task in front of a non-biased, non-partisan commission that can do a thoughtful analysis in the interim of the legislative session, we will be setting ourselves up for the best chance of success with this goal.

To be sure, we all have thoughts or ideas on how to modernize this institution or make this institution run more efficiently and effectively. We probably all have different ideas about what those latter words mean and the implications behind them as well. Perhaps the processes and structures we already utilize will prove to be the best for our state. I would wager, however, there are things we can learn from other state legislatures around the country and the other laboratories of democracy that may be to our benefit.

Again, as I previously stated, this bill does not make any changes to current processes or procedures. I simply would like to know if there can be any consensus around what could provide for a better or more modern process and if there are ways to do our jobs better and, thus, be better stewards of the public's interest.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions.

**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.