

April 3, 2024

The Honorable Rachel Talbot Ross
Speaker of the House
2 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

The Honorable Troy Jackson
President of the Senate
3 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

The Honorable Billy-Bob Faulkingham
Republican Leader
2 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

The Honorable Trey Stewert
Republican Leader
3 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Legislative Leaders,

I am writing to request that you prioritize reforms to the legislative rules to make public policy-making more transparent to and inclusive of the public.

The Maine State Chamber of Commerce has been raising concerns about the erosion of fundamental transparency in the legislative process for years, most recently at our Leadership Summit in February. Effectively, the historic courtesy of allowing legislators to introduce bills without precise legislative language is now being used with alarming frequency and in concerning methods. In a number of Committees, the time-honored process of public review and comment has been abandoned or limited. Specifically, there have been instances where committee votes have occurred for legislative proposals in which the public has been prevented from reviewing the exact language of the bill. Regardless of the motivations, the Maine Legislature has developed a basic transparency problem that must be addressed prior to the convening of the next Legislature.

It should be noted that some legislative committees have developed a template that could serve as a model for updated rules. Most notably, during this session the Judiciary Committee has undertaken a review of the state's consumer privacy laws that has been deliberative, transparent, inclusive and substantive. Each step of the way, over multiple public hearings and work sessions, amendments have been shared with the public well in advance, using electronic means. This process has enabled the public to weigh in effectively and in enough time for comments to be received and considered by the Committee. The Judiciary Committee has exemplified best practices in the public's work and should be instructive to the Legislature in consideration of rule changes applicable to all committees.

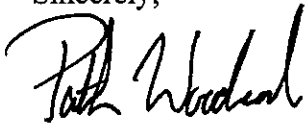
While the specific rule changes should similarly be subject to public hearing and public debate, the Maine State Chamber of Commerce believes the following should be considered in any rules package:

- Language Transparency. Require that legislative language be publicly released 72 hours prior to the public hearing or work session of a policy committee. Amendments should be required 24 hours prior to a work session and publicly available;
- Bill Introduction Deadline. Eliminate the current deadline for bill introductions to allow lawmakers more time to develop legislative ideas and text.
- 2nd Session Legislation. Restrict legislative bills that are carried over to the next session to those with written legislative language.

These recommendations would not only improve public transparency, but would also increase legislative efficiency, as the disposal of the piles of conceptual legislative bills is a colossal waste of time taking away finite resources from staff, committees, and legislators. In addition to rule changes, tutorials and workshops for incoming Committee Chairs to ensure an understanding of protocols and best practices prior to the session, would create consistency across the Legislature.

The time for action is now and the Maine State Chamber of Commerce looks forward to collaborating on some commonsense governance reforms that improve transparency and efficiency.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick Woodcock". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Patrick" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Woodcock".

Patrick Woodcock
President and CEO
Maine State Chamber of Commerce