



**STATE OF VERMONT**  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**MEMORANDUM**

To: House Rules Committee  
From: Rep. Jill Krowinski, Speaker of the House  
Date: July 12, 2022  
Subject: 2022 End of Session Member Survey

As we continue to evaluate ways that we can make the legislative process more accessible for Vermonters, we are simultaneously evaluating the ways that we can make the work for elected members, and those that may be interested in representing their communities, more manageable. After the session a survey was sent out to all members and we received 72 individual responses. Below is a high-level overview of the responses we received.

*1. How we governed this year was different than any other year since we conducted our work on zoom, in a hybrid set up and in person. House Rules and my office worked hard to find a balanced approach that kept people safe. We socially distanced and spread out through the building, wore masks, adjusted schedules, etc. Are there changes that we made that you think should continue?*

- Continue to allow access to the committee process via Zoom.
- I feel that it offers greater transparency for the public to be able to access hearings via YouTube or livestream. Enabling witnesses to use a zoom format allows them to have greater interactive access with the committee and legislators to have a wider variety of witnesses if they are unable to attend in person.
- I appreciate the efforts that were made to provide flexibility to members to participate remotely when sick or caring for family members. I think the accommodations for members with a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act was really important and must be continued. I'm also grateful for the gender-neutral dress code.
- Streaming floor sessions and committee meetings on YouTube was a huge step forward in accessibility, I'm glad that these innovations will continue.
- The YouTube recording of committee meetings
- I liked the spreading out in the building and the adjusted schedule. distancing and masking were helpful but might not be as time goes on

2. *What did you think didn't work well or could be improved?*

- Find a way to lessen the duplication of bills. Sometimes several bills can be combined into one bill. This would free up legislative counsel.
- Cafeteria traffic flow could be improved. Increased seating in the cafeteria is necessary. Committee room occupancy limits were too low.
- Illness status related to Covid only. Members could only vote if on zoom and was Covid positive. Other documented illnesses should be allowed if verified by a health care provider.
- Sometimes it was difficult to find an open legislative meeting room, as some legislators used them for separate meetings. It would be helpful to figure out breakout rooms that accommodate phone calls and meetings, and those for working silently. I think we should also be able to vote for vetoes remotely under certain circumstances, as we are allowing those with Covid-related concerns to vote remotely on the floor.

3. *When House Rules meets to discuss strategies to make it easier for people to serve, what barriers or challenges do you face and what policy changes could we make to help?*

- Barriers and challenges: low pay, no health benefits, no child care, and needing to maintain outside employment. Participation via Zoom and the ability to vote via Zoom would go a long way to address logistical barriers.
- Make it possible for people to work remotely during inclement weather. Make allowances for people with children at home or other family members who need care. Offer insurance; increase pay; consider compensation for time worked while not in session; it would be nice to be able to meet constituents when they come to the State House without having to navigate the stairs to the third floor; provide parking allowances as part of the per diem for people who need to park close to the building/s where they lodge
- Establish an ad hoc Committee to make recommendations about the future of the current legislative model that makes it difficult for the Body to fully reflect the people of Vermont, including potential changes in compensation and benefits, in size of the body. This is, I believe, critical to face squarely.
- Hearing especially from younger members the issues are health insurance especially.
- And we are asking people essentially to work with very little pay. For those in prime earning years that will impact future social security. During my 14 years in the House, I believe that expectations for working year-round have increased, and perhaps there should be some sort of out of session stipend.
- Perhaps amending rules so that in extreme weather conditions members could participate remotely.

4. *When you talk with people serving in office, what's the biggest barrier you hear about?*
  - The lack & cost of childcare, low pay and lack of benefits as well as the ability to get the time off from their job to serve.
  - Small children at home is one I hear a lot, as well as the fundamental challenge of serving as a legislator while also holding down a full-time job.
  - The biggest one is the nature of the role: too part-time to be your living, but too intensive during the winter to maintain most other jobs. Specific to my area: the distance to Montpelier means that commuting isn't a reasonable option. That is particularly hard for parents.
  - It is hugely difficult to have a job and work as a legislator- part time, no health insurance and low pay. That makes it accessible only to those who are retired or have another form of support. Makes it inaccessible for younger and working people .
  
5. *What are some specific changes you think we could make to broaden the opportunity for people to serve?*
  - Pay and seasonal nature. I tried hard to recruit many candidates this spring and heard time and time again from folks that they were very interested in running and serving but couldn't make the seasonal nature and low pay work. It's discouraging and bad for democracy that the structure doesn't work for a diversity of Vermonters.
  - tie leg calendar to school calendar for vacations. It is tough to give up 2 school vacations with family. A statewide school calendar will be under review this summer.
  - Increase the terms to 4 years; include health care benefits, if needed, allow for a longer winter break (10-14 days) in the winter.
  - I think reconsidering again some form of COLA increases that happen in concert with the other branches of government would be beneficial.
  - Shorten the Legislative session to reflect the size of our state in comparison to other states that have similar or even larger constituencies and much shorter sessions.
  - Establishing an annual clear and certain adjournment date would broaden the opportunity to serve as participants and their employers and families could plan specifically. The limited compensation and benefits are not commiserate with an open ended commitment to service.
  
6. *The Clerk's Office would like to know: Are there more things they can do to support members?*
  - The Clerk's Office has done an awesome job supporting legislators.

- Sending out the daily calendar with links to bills up for action were very helpful.
- The Clerk's Office does a fantastic job!
- The Clerk's office was incredible in postings etc. So responsive to members. Perhaps they could do training & refresher re decorum: speaking thru Speaker; interrogations; introductions; etc
- My experience has been that the Clerk's Office did an outstanding job keeping us informed of the next day's calendar, as well as bill changes during the last couple of weeks.
- The Clerk's Office is literally amazing and there is nothing else I would ask for from them!