

# Vermont House of Representatives

*House Clerk's Office*

Decorum Training

February 1, 2022



# House Clerk's Office:

## Your House Procedure Resource!

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# General Principles of Legislative Procedure

## ▶ Equality of members.

- ▶ “For any democratic group to be able to operate, acceptance of the principle of equality of members is essential . . . Equality is essential to secure the acceptance of decisions of the body.” *Mason’s Sec. 49-1.*
- ▶ “The process of electing representatives to exercise the plenary powers of the people presumes that each representative is of equal status as every other representative.” *Mason’s Sec. 49-2.*

## ▶ Order and efficiency.

- ▶ “In order for a legislative body to work efficiently together, there must be an accepted manner of doing things.” *Mason’s Sec. 50.*
- ▶ “In the interest of saving time and effort of the members and avoiding confusion, the most direct and simplest means of accomplishing a purpose should be followed.” *Mason’s Sec. 52.*

## ▶ Debate and vote on specific questions.

- ▶ “An important practical principle is that only one proposal can be considered at a time.” *Mason’s Sec. 53-1.*
- ▶ Members “must have an opportunity to debate the proposals to be voted upon. They have the right to express their opinions and hear the opinions of others to aid them to come to an agreement and reach valid joint decisions.” *Mason’s Sec. 42-6.*

# General Outline of a Legislative Day

- ▶ Moment of Silence or Devotional.
- ▶ Pledge of Allegiance (on Tuesdays).
- ▶ Bill introductions and referral to committee or, for committee bills, placement on next day's Notice Calendar via [House Rule 48](#).
- ▶ Bill referrals to money committees via [House Rule 35\(a\)](#).
- ▶ Reading of resolutions, with three options via [House Rule 52](#): 1) Read and adopt; 2) Read and place on next day's Action Calendar; or 3) Treat as a bill.
- ▶ Announcements.
- ▶ Action Calendar, a.k.a. "Orders of the Day."
- ▶ Announcements.
- ▶ Adjourn until next legislative day.

# Hybrid Operation: General Overview

IN-PERSON = Members in Chamber

- ▶ **Being recognized.**
  - ▶ Must be at your desk or alternative seating to be recognized.
  - ▶ Stand to be recognized and sit down if not recognized. If you are unable to stand, raise your hand to be recognized.
- ▶ **Audio.**
  - ▶ Only turn on your desk microphone while you are speaking and turn it off when you are done speaking.
  - ▶ Do not turn on your microphone to vote.
  - ▶ Remain quiet while others are speaking - even whispered conversations may be heard across the chamber.
- ▶ **Zoom.** In-person members should NOT log in to Zoom.

REMOTE = Members anywhere else

- ▶ **Being recognized.**
  - ▶ Raise your Zoom hand to be recognized and keep it raised until recognized.
- ▶ **Audio.**
  - ▶ Remote members should always be muted unless they are speaking or voting.
  - ▶ **PLEASE REMEMBER TO MUTE YOURSELF** when you are done speaking.
- ▶ **Zoom.**
  - ▶ Remote members must participate from their individual Zoom profile.
  - ▶ Members should NOT log in through any group Zoom.

# General Chamber Operation & Policies

- ▶ **Lights and bells.**
  - ▶ Bells will ring and a red light will blink approximately five minutes before session begins.
  - ▶ A separate bell will ring when a roll call is about to begin.
- ▶ **Food and drinks.** Food and drinks are prohibited in the chamber, except that members can drink water and store their water bottle on the shelf under their desk.
- ▶ **Electronics.** Electronics are permitted on the floor for legislative purposes, *but electronics should always be on mute!*
  - ▶ Be aware that your electronic device is visible to others in the chamber and potentially on the chamber livestream.
- ▶ **Attire.** Members should wear professional attire when attending a House session.
- ▶ **Points of Order.** When a member stands to raise a point of order, the member whose conduct is being called to order should sit down until the Speaker rules on the point of order.

# Devotionals and Announcements

- ▶ Devotionals and Announcements should not be used to advocate policy.
  - ▶ Policy advocacy is conducted through the legislative process of sponsoring bills and resolutions.
- ▶ Purpose of Devotionals: A devotional helps to set the tone at the beginning of a legislative day and allows a few moments for reflection and contemplation.
  - ▶ No one (including members!) is permitted to enter the chamber while devotionals are being conducted.
- ▶ Purpose of Announcements: General announcements of events and miscellaneous motions outside the Orders of the Day (ex.: motion to relieve a committee of a bill and commit it to a different committee).
  - ▶ Do you have a “*Point of Personal Privilege*” to announce? Probably not! These are matters “affecting the rights, reputation[,] and conduct of members of the body in their representative capacity” and “must relate to persons as members of the body or relate to charges against their character that would, if true, incapacitate them for membership.” *Mason’s* Sec. 222-1 and -2.

# General Principles of Debate

- ▶ **It's about proposals, not members.** No personalities in debate.
  - ▶ Avoid referring to members by name; instead, try to refer to them by town: “The member from [X Town].”
  - ▶ “A member, in referring to another member, should avoid using the member’s name, rather identifying that member by district, by seat, as the member who last spoke[,] or by describing the member in some other respectful manner.” *Mason’s Sec. 124-2.*
- ▶ **Debate through Speaker.** Direct all debate and related questions through Speaker:
  - ▶ “Madam Speaker, may I interrogate the member from [X] Town?”
  - ▶ “Madam Speaker, can the member tell me [question]?”
  - ▶ Signal when your interrogation is complete: “Madam Speaker, I thank the member.”
- ▶ **Props.** No props in debate:
  - ▶ No advocacy pins or signs.
  - ▶ *See also* the [Legislative Face Mask Policy](#), which requires member masks to conform to the chambers’ custom of prohibiting props in debate.
  - ▶ Any handout must be: 1) Signed by the member offering it (ex.: bill reporter); 2) Pre-approved by Speaker; and 3) Distributed through Clerk’s Office.



# Voting Procedures: Voice Vote

- ▶ Method of voting:
  - ▶ Vote “Aye” if in favor; or
  - ▶ Vote “Nay” if opposed.
- ▶ Before the Speaker announces the result of the vote - including *after* the Speaker states that “the [Ayes or Nays] appear to have it”, but *before* the Speaker announces that “the [Ayes or Nays] do have it” - a member may ask for a DIVISION or ROLL CALL.
  - ▶ Please request this LOUDLY and be ready to identify yourself as the individual requesting the division or roll call.

# Voting Procedures: Divisions

- ▶ When a vote by division is conducted, the clerks first count and record those members voting Yes, and then those members voting No.
  - ▶ Members voting in the chamber should stand (or raise their hand if unable to stand), and members voting remotely should raise their Zoom hand.
- ▶ If a member would like to request a ROLL CALL, the member must do so before the Speaker announces the result of the vote by division.

# Voting Procedures: Roll Calls

- ▶ The Roll Call bell will ring when a roll call is about to begin.
- ▶ All electronics must be turned off. Members should be in their designated voting location and remain AS QUIET AS POSSIBLE so that the clerks can hear members' votes.
- ▶ When the Speaker directs the Clerk to start the roll, the roll will be called alphabetically until the first member responds, and then there will be a short break to allow the Clerk's Office to prepare for the roll call.
  - ▶ During this break, only members are permitted on the floor.
- ▶ All members who are present must vote when their name is called.
- ▶ When the Clerk calls your name, please vote in a loud, clear, and plain voice:
  - ▶ "Yes" if in favor; or
  - ▶ "No" if opposed.
- ▶ For members voting remotely, if you are unable to have your video on, you must verify your identity before voting: "I certify that this is Rep. [X] of [Y Town], and I vote [Yes or No]."

# House Journal

- ▶ Vt. Const. Ch. II, § 9 established the House Journal as the House’s official, constitutional record of the House’s votes and proceedings, including members’ individual roll call votes and any accompanying vote explanations.
- ▶ House Rule 19:
  - ▶ Requires the Clerk’s Office to prepare the Journal; and
  - ▶ Prohibits devotionals and members’ comments during debate from being recorded in the Journal.
- ▶ House Rule 70 requires members to submit their roll call vote explanations to the Clerk’s Office “immediately” and “in writing[,]” and generally recommends that vote explanations be “infrequent and brief.”
  - ▶ If you explain your vote, please email your explanation to the Clerk’s Office - [House\\_Staff@leg.state.vt.us](mailto:House_Staff@leg.state.vt.us) - as soon as possible so that it can be included in the Journal.

# Other General Information

- ▶ **Calendar and Journal.** Read the Calendar everyday to find out that day's agenda, and review the previous day's Journal.
- ▶ **Pages.** Pages are eighth graders who have applied and been accepted to the Page Program. They help to pass paper communications in the Chamber and around the State House.
  - ▶ If you have a note that you would like the pages to pass for you, please get their attention by LIGHTLY tapping your pen on your desk, or by holding up the paper you would like them to pass. Please include the seat number or the committee room number if known.
- ▶ **“The Line.”** Watch the line!
  - ▶ Pages are prohibited from breaking the invisible line from the Speaker to the member(s) speaking on the floor.
  - ▶ Members should also be respectful of the line and try not to break it whenever possible.

# Thank you!

- ▶ Please contact the House Clerk's Office with ANY procedural questions.
- ▶ Contact us:
  - ▶ By phone at 828-2247;
  - ▶ Stop by our office; or
  - ▶ Email us at [House\\_Staff@leg.state.vt.us](mailto:House_Staff@leg.state.vt.us)

