

TESTIMONY TO THE
GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION & ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

***HB 6600 – “An Act Implementing The Recommendations Of The
Legislative Paperless Task Force And The Task Force To Study
The Reduction Of State Agency Paper And Duplicative Procedures”***

It is laudable that the Legislature is seeking ways to save money by increasing efficiency and reducing redundancy by examining ways to reduce legislative printing, especially during these tight fiscal times. The Legislative Paperless Task Force is to be commended for their hard work and the recommendations they put forth to assist in achieving this goal, as well as the Government Administration & Elections committee for raising this bill.

However, it is critical that this not be done in a vacuum and that careful consideration is given to protecting the public's ability to access information -and- ensuring the preservation of the legislative record.

The biggest obstacle in the way of having this proposal be effective and not hamper the two objectives outlined above is the lack of (1) consistency among committees; (2) adequate staff training; and (3) consistent internet access.

In the last several weeks alone I personally have experienced several committees starting public hearing sign-ups ½ to 1 hour earlier than what was posted in the bulletin; one committee refusing on several occasions to provide a copy of a meeting agenda; the Legislative Library disallowing printing of any legislative document that exceeds a certain page length; the inability to log on to the wi-fi in the building due to the high level of use by others in the building; and, on at least one occasion, the entire General Assembly website being completely inaccessible for several hours. In addition, as we move through the committee process and bills are being voted on, some committees are taking more than a week's time to post minutes of meetings - let alone substitute language on bills.

As someone who has worked in the building, both on staff and in the private sector, for more than 13 years I understand the process of the General Assembly. Even with this experience, I still find it difficult at times to obtain needed “public” information and find staff willing to be helpful in facilitating the dissemination of this “public” information.

The average person coming into this building seeking to partake in the legislative process, without the guidance of someone knowledgeable about the building to assist in the navigation, has great difficulty finding the information they are seeking. Imagine this same member of the public coming upon signs on committee office doors banning entry by anyone but legislators – a common occurrence with some committees during the JF process. I urge you to take a challenge – ask a constituent, with no previous knowledge of the building or process, to come on a busy day anonymously and attempt to accomplish certain tasks asking questions only of staff. Ask them to relay back to you their experience and the treatment they received from committee staff. I am confident that you will find it to be enlightening.

With all of this said, seeking to achieve greater efficiencies in the process is an excellent goal. However, please be sure that it comes along with (1) improved wi-fi access and CGA external internet site protections; (2) comprehensive staff training; (3) standardized rules; and (4) careful protection of the “openness” of our government to which the Constitution protects the public's ability to “petition” it.

Thank you,
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