

## **District of Columbia Council Reform**

by the District of Columbia Affairs Section of the D.C. Bar

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Steps should be taken to maximize notice of public meetings. Hearings should be preferred over public roundtables because of the longer notice requirement. Publication should occur in the newspaper and via the internet as well as in the D.C. Register (steps should be taken to minimize the number of Council meetings with little or no public notice);
- The Council calendar should be published weekly and widely disseminated, e.g., on the Council's website;
- Sufficient copies of pending legislation always should be readily available in legislative services (e.g., a xerox machine should be installed), and at hearings or markup sessions;
- Every councilmembers' vote should be recorded and made publicly available on all measures to maximize Councilmember participation and accountability;
- All Council legislative sessions, hearings and roundtables should start on time. Hearings and roundtables should continue for pre-set times with carry over to the next working day if necessary;
- Television coverage should include printed names of the individuals testifying, subject matter of the hearing and other important information;
- Emergency legislative procedures should be introduced sparingly only in an emergency.

Additionally, the Council may want to form a standing or ad hoc Council Operations Committee to evaluate and recommend operational changes. The Council also needs to strengthen and build on existing in-house capacity to gather and analyze data in critical areas, in which Council action is anticipated.

# DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA AFFAIRS SECTION



Sixth Floor  
1100 Constitution Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C.

20005-5937  
(202) 626-3163  
FAX (202) 626-3453

Sections EventLine  
(202) 626-3455

Web Site Address:  
[www.dcbar.org/  
pro\\_resources/sections](http://www.dcbar.org/pro_resources/sections)

The District of Columbia Bar

January 25, 1999

## Steering Committee:

Angela Thornton Harvey, Co-Chair  
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Melody R. Webb

Chairman, Linda W. Cropp (At-Large)  
Council of the District of Columbia  
441 4th Street, NW, Rm 704  
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mrs. Cropp:

Joan H. Strand  
Board of Governors Liaison

Lorraine C. Miller  
Board of Governors Liaison

## Committees:

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Education  
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D.C. Bar Executive Director

Cynthia D. Hill  
D.C. Bar Assistant Executive  
Director, Programs

Carol Ann Cunningham  
Sections Manager

The District of Columbia Bar D.C. Affairs Section, Legislation Committee, takes this opportunity to congratulate you and your colleagues on your recent elections. The Committee offers our continuing support during this period leading to the return of Home Rule to the District of Columbia. We also want to let you know that members of the Committee are available to you for consultation on substantive or procedural legislative issues in our areas of expertise. To give you a little background, the D.C. Affairs Section focuses on programs and activities related to current issues facing the District of Columbia including its governance structure, economic development and revitalization, and business regulatory reform. The Legislation subcommittee was re-activated this year. Its focus is on D.C. Council operations and legislation. In addition, we plan to offer educational programs for members of the bar and for the community on legislative topics. We welcome your participation in our meetings and in future programs.

We are aware that your new leadership offers a real opportunity to consider key areas of Council reform. We understand that some reforms and innovations are already under consideration. We also understand that you are planning a retreat in late January. In the spirit of cooperation, Committee members want to raise several matters for the Council's consideration at or before the retreat.

As a preliminary matter, we note that some city councils have either a standing or ad hoc "Council Operations Committees." This may be an excellent time to formulate such a committee to evaluate and recommend operational changes arising out of the reports soon to be issued by NCSL and the Appleseed Center. Operational changes are difficult to effect in a committee of

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the whole setting because of the many important legislative issues addressed by that Committee. The time is ripe to address longstanding operational problems through a more focused effort by a Council Committee.

Secondly, the Committee supports the co-equal efforts of the executive and legislative branches in bringing about improvements. The Mayor-Elect employs an analytic and data driven approach to changing the status quo. This approach will no doubt be used to develop and build local support for legislative proposals. Committee members suggest that the Council move to strengthen and build on existing in-house capacity to gather and analyze data in critical areas, in which Council action is anticipated.

Finally, Committee members are keenly interested in supporting efforts to develop more meaningful public participation and access to information at the Council. In this spirit, the following suggestions are provided for the Council's consideration:

- Steps should be taken to maximize notice of public meetings. Hearings should be preferred over public roundtables because of the longer notice requirement. Publication should occur in the newspaper and via the internet as well as in the D.C. Register (steps should be taken to minimize the number of Council meetings with little or no public notice);
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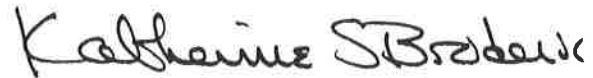
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Chairman Linda W. Cropp  
January 25, 1999

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- Emergency legislative procedures should be introduced sparingly only in an emergency.

Thank you for your consideration of these issues in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,



Katherine S. Broderick, Chair  
D.C. Bar, D.C. Affairs  
Section, Legislation Comm.

cc: Sandy Allen  
Sharon Ambrose  
Harold Brazil  
David Catania  
Kevin Chavous  
Charlene Drew-Jarvis  
Jack Evans  
Jim Graham  
Phil Mendelson  
Vincent Orange  
Kathy Patterson  
Carol Schwartz  
Phyllis Jones, Secy