



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
House of Representatives
State House, Boston 02133-1054

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Rep. Smola pushes increased transparency in House

BOSTON – Representative Todd M. Smola (R-Warren, Ranking Member, Committee on Ways & Means) recently opposed a new House rules package, saying it does not go far enough to ensure increased transparency in the way the House of Representatives and its legislative committees operate.

House Bill 3930, an Order establishing permanent House rules for the 2021-2022 legislative session, was approved on a vote of 129-29 on July 7, but failed to include a number of reforms to increase government transparency. During floor debate, Representative Smola led the effort on an amendment filed by the House Republican leadership team requiring that all committee polls be open for a minimum of two hours. He said this would give legislators time to properly review the bills being polled and to make a more informed decision when casting their votes. The amendment was rejected.

“The majority party has once again failed to advance meaningful reforms when it comes to the rules of the House,” said Representative Smola. “Our constituents expect nothing less than our full engagement in the legislative process, yet we continue to operate under antiquated rules that provide little time for members to review legislation before it is released from committee. Those in opposition to these proposals missed an opportunity to expand access to the public and open the doors to state government.”

Representative Smola also supported two similar transparency amendments, one filed by Republicans and one filed by Democrats, to require House committees to post on the Legislature’s website within 48 hours all votes taken at an executive session or on a poll detailing how each individual member voted. Both amendments failed on separate votes of 38-121 and 41-117.

Additional amendments supported by Representative Smola included proposals:

- Allowing any member serving on active reserve military duty to participate remotely in a formal session, subject to the requirements and limitations of federal law and regulation (this amendment passed on a vote of 160-0);
- Limiting the Speaker of the House's term of office to no more than eight consecutive years (this amendment failed on a vote of 35-125);
- Requiring committee chairs who schedule an emergency committee meeting that conflicts with a formal House session to provide the House Clerk with a written explanation detailing the emergency and requiring the Clerk to provide this explanation to the members (this amendment failed on a vote of 30-129);
- Requiring the House Clerk to post a calendar for all sessions, including informal sessions, on the Legislature's website and to e-mail notifications to members and staff at least half an hour prior to the start of session, in addition to requiring the Clerk to provide members and staff with a list of all miscellaneous papers to be taken up at least 15 minutes prior to the start of session (this amendment failed on a vote of 33-126); and
- Requiring members to have at least an hour to review any consolidated amendments prior to the amendment being taken up for a vote by the House (this amendment failed on a vote of 32-127).

For additional information please contact Representative Smola at Todd.Smola@mahouse.gov or (617) 722-2100.

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