

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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Report of the Committee on Information and Technology in the Legislature

November 26, 1996

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Introduction

In the past few years, the pace of information and telecommunications technology has exploded. Consider these changes since the mid 1980's: fax machines, deregulation and increased choices of telecommunications providers, greatly reduced costs of communications services, the rise of cable TV, satellite communications systems, cellular phones, electronic mail, fiber optic cable, the Internet, graphical user interfaces such as Windows (making computers easier to use), sophisticated software, and the 100 to 1,000 fold increase in power of a Pentium PC over the original personal computers.

The Maine Legislature has not taken advantage of these changes. Within the State House itself, the computer systems are only now being weaned away from obsolete Wang systems and onto what is called a "client-server" network. The computers are connected to the Internet but there are very few of them available for use by Legislators. Legislators in the House or Senate chamber struggle to find a bill or amendment then being taken up, hopefully before they have to vote on it. The bills are buried away in huge notebooks that take up most of the space on the legislator's desk. There is access to bill status through the Wang system, but it is not easy to use. Access exists from out of the State House is through the "LINK" system, but it is not easy to use either, and none but the bravest try.

Maine's Legislature is seriously behind other states in using these new technologies. Maine's legislature, unlike the Executive and Judicial Branches of Maine's government, and unlike almost all other State Legislatures, has yet to establish a presence on the Internet.

Ordinary citizens of Maine who wish to keep up with what the Legislature is doing can order copies of everything by mail. **But the cost of obtaining all these services is over \$1,500 per year.** Most of the time the public has no idea what the Legislature is doing, and this is at least partially because they have no easy access to that information.

The Legislature processes a lot of information, whether it be to draft bills and amendments and keep track of their progress, post schedules, print legislative records, take minutes, schedule committee hearings or handle information requests from the public. The first step in the processing of this information is almost always that the information is put into a computer. Sometimes it is then printed out and copied; sometimes it is sent along for further processing. The final product is printed and then delivered by hand or mail to people who are thought to have an interest in it. Not all people get the word. If the information changes for some reason, all the people who have received the original will have to be notified.

Technology now exists to allow all that information, already in a legislative computer, to be continuously and easily posted on the Internet as it is developed, so that legislators and the public can have inexpensive and immediate access to it through a computer terminal, whenever they wish and wherever they happen to be.

The Internet:

1. Is easy enough for most people to use;
2. Is available through all Maine Schools and Libraries, and a large and increasing number of Maine households;
3. Is accessible from anywhere in the world;
4. Is inexpensive to connect to;
5. Is enthusiastically embraced by major corporations for their information needs; and
6. Is a doorway to an enormous amount of information useful to Legislators.

Posting legislative information on the Internet would:

- Cost less in the long run than the present system
- Provide better and more up to date information to more people.
- Allow information to be found more easily than is the case today

The Internet is the answer for public information and partially for legislator's needs, and they are 2 of the 3 "customers" of legislative information the Committee has identified. However, there are still serious issues related to internal use of information technology by the staff. The Committee has received a list of a large number of needs and desires of staff. We do not have the expertise to make recommendations about these technical matters, but we do believe that solving these problems requires that the Information Systems department be reorganized, and that a person be hired as head of the department to manage and to plan.

Back when the choices for computer systems and information systems were limited, managing and planning were much simpler. The Legislature hired an information systems manager in the early 1980's, when it installed the existing Wang system. After that system was up and running, they decided they didn't need a manager any more - and perhaps they were right.

Today, the situation is fundamentally different, in the following ways:

- One can do more with the technology;
- There are many more choices to be made about available technology; and
- Systems are increasingly complex.

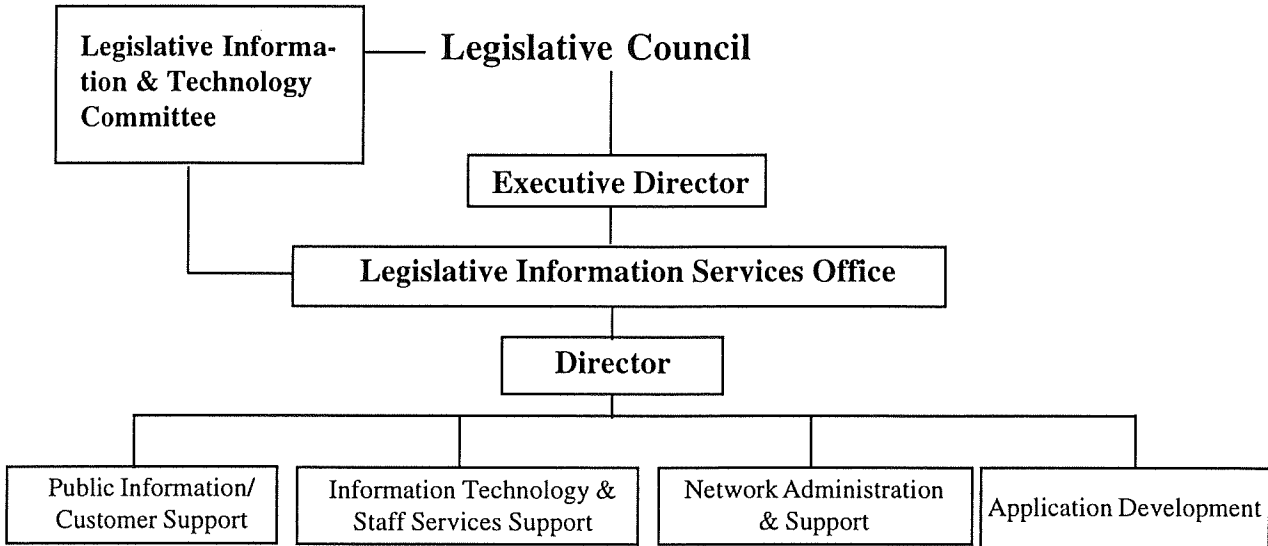
The Information Systems people now working for the Legislature do their jobs well. But none of them are trained as planners or managers, and the Committee unanimously recommends that a manager for Information Systems be hired as soon as possible, and that he or she be a level 14 employee.

What follows is a more specific outline of each of the recommendations from the Committee. It is our hope that this proves to be a very useful first step in developing a plan for technology that serves Legislators, Legislative Staff and the public in the best possible manner. We have a tremendous opportunity for this Council and the next Council to make the great leap forward and ensure access to the Legislative process for all.



Recommendations

Reorganization. The Committee recommends that the Legislative Information Office and the Information Systems Office be combined into a Legislative Information Services Office. See Chart 2 for a full description of the reorganization.



Establish an Information and Technology Committee. The Committee recommends that the Legislative Council establish a standing committee of the Council, comprising of representatives of the Council, the Secretary of the Senate, the Clerk of the House, the Executive Director, Staff Office Directors, and the Director of Legislative Information Services. Committee to meet regularly to review an Information Services Plan developed by the Office and make recommendations to the Council regarding the policies and priorities for information systems development and implementation, resource allocation, priorities for new system development and policy issues requiring Council resolution.


Staffing* - New Director Position. The Committee was unanimous in its recommendation that the Council hire a Director to manage the new office. The Committee recommends that the Council establish the director position at the same level as the other office directors, and be appointed in the same manner as other directors of the nonpartisan offices. (* The Legislature currently has a funded, unfilled analyst position in OFPR that the Executive Director recommended to be reclassified and used to establish the new Director position.)

Staffing - Other Staff positions. The Committee was unable to come to agreement on the next step with regard to filling the vacant positions. However, there was little disagreement that the current staffing level, because of two vacancies*, is not sufficient to carry out the current workload. The Committee present three options for consideration by the Council. (*The two vacancies are the Sr. Office Support Coordinator and the Network Support/Programmer Ass't.)

1. Fill the 2 vacancies immediately. *Rationale:* The current staff is unable to keep up with the current workload, and the upcoming session will only exacerbate the problem. The 2 temporary positions, authorized by the Council, have been filled and are sufficient to meet some of the demand, but they do not replace two full-time employees. There is a learning curve involved and temporary employees will be leaving just as they have become familiar with the Legislative operation.

2. Promptly hire the recommended new director position, then fill the two vacancies. *Rationale:* A new Director who has knowledge and experience in information systems, particularly network systems will be in the best position to assess the structure of the office and skills (particularly new skills) needed to establish and operate the new Legislative Information Systems Office. The Director, after assessing the needs, priorities and vision for the office will be better suited to fill vacancies based on the needs of a new office and not merely continue past staffing arrangements.

3. Extend the temporary positions to 180 days. *Rationale:* The Council authorized two temporary positions for 90 days each. There was some support on the committee for extending the length of those temporary positions to 180 days. By extending the positions to 180 days, the Information Systems office would have the staff to assist with current needs of the opening of session and perhaps continue through the hiring of a new director. While not an ideal solution, it does provide the office with the immediate staffing needs, and allows the new director to make appropriate hiring decisions of new staff.

 **Maine State Legislature - Web Page on the Internet.** The Committee recommends that the Legislature Establish a fully operational Legislative Homepage on the Internet by the opening of the 118th Legislative session. The Committee has developed a prototype of the Home page (see attached) and has asked a subcommittee to establish a timetable for the completing of the Homepage, including a long term plan and an outline of staffing needs and policy considerations. The subcommittee will be providing a full plan for the implementation of the Homepage to the Legislative Council in early December.

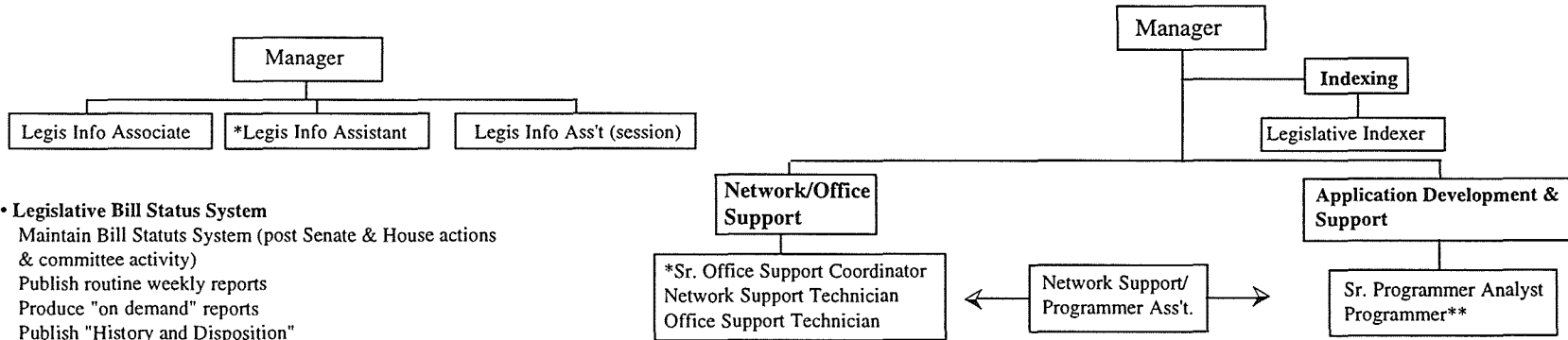
Current organization of the Information Systems Office and the Legislative Information Office

Legislative Council

Executive Director

Legislative Information Office

Information Systems Office



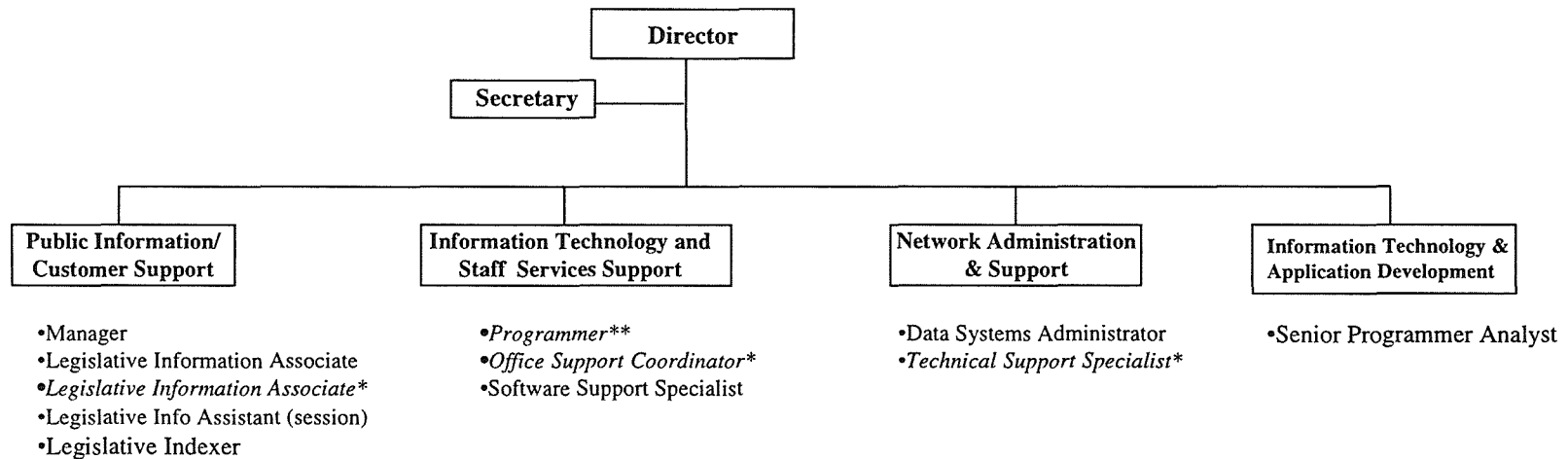
- **Legislative Bill Status System**
 Maintain Bill Statuts System (post Senate & House actions & committee activity)
 Publish routine weekly reports
 Produce "on demand" reports
 Publish "History and Disposition"
- **Schedule Legislative Hearing Rooms**
- **Support to Joint Standing Committees**
 Administrative supervision of Clerks & general admin. support to Committees
 Archive committee records
 Confirmation scheduling; correspondence; staffing; recordkeeping
- **Oversee "housekeeping" of committee rooms**
- **Assist in Indexing the Legislative Record**

- **Training**
- **Telephone installation/repair**
- **Application support ("HELP")**
- **Hardware installation and repair**
- **Software**
 evaluation
 installation/upgrades
- **Backup**
 administration
- **Security**
- **Network Installation/Management**
 Novell
 NT
 Wang

- **Data Base Application Management**
 Bill status
 Drafting
 Fiscal Notes
 Statutes
 Calendars
 Mail/labels
 Accounting
 Others
- **Migration Planning and Program Development**
- **Evaluation of PC Development Tools**

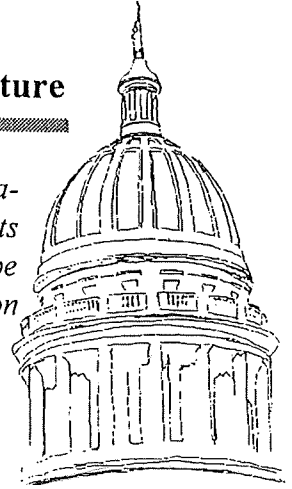
* Currently vacant
 ** "On Loan" from the Office of the Revisor

Proposed Reorganization of the Information Systems Office and the Legislative Information Office: Staffing



* Position is currently vacant
** Position is currently on loan from the Office of the Revisor

Maine State Legislature Survey on Information Technology Needs for the Legislature



The Legislative Council is in the process of examining computer information technology needs in the Legislature. One of the main discussion points concerns access to technology for Legislators. The following survey will be extremely helpful as the Council develops a plan for computerized information that best serves all Legislators.

Name (optional) _____

1. Please check one of the following:

- I am a new Legislator
- I am a returning Legislator
- My Legislative service terminated at the end of the 117th Legislature
- other, _____

2. Reflecting on the previous Legislative session. How would you rate your access to **electronic information** (*information via computers*) during the last session? (*please check one*)

- Poor
- Fair
- Good
- Excellent
- Not sure
- I am a new Legislator

3. We are interested in hearing your comments concerning your ability to access information. Please comment on your own experiences in accessing information during the session.

One of the goals of the Committee is to determine what type of technologies would be most useful. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "not useful" and 5 being the "most useful", how would you rate each of the technologies in assisting you with your Legislative work. (please circle one number)

| | Not Useful | | | | Most Useful | |
|--|---------------|---|---|---|----------------|----------|
| 4. Computers at your desk (in the chamber) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | not sure |
| 5. Access to Legislation from home | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | not sure |
| 6. Computers in the committee room | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | not sure |
| 7. Homepages on the Internet for Legislators | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | not sure |
| 8. Access to phone lines for lap top computers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | not sure |
| 9. A computer room with access for Legislators to computers for word processing, printing and other software | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | not sure |

Please go to next page

One of the issues currently being discussed by the technology committee concerns the use of computers in the chamber, possibly at each legislators desk. If each Legislator were to have access to a computer in the chamber or at some other convenient location, how important would you rank each of the following, with 1 being "not helpful" at all and 5 being "very helpful" (circle one)

ALSO - Please rank each of the next 8 items in order of importance to you, (in the box on the right) with 1 being the most important and 8 being the least important.

| | Not <u>Helpful</u> | | Very <u>Helpful</u> | | | RANK (by importance) | |
|--|-----------------------|---|------------------------|---|---|--------------------------------|-------|
| 10. Access to the status and text of bills | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | not sure | _____ |
| 11. Access to the status and text of amendments | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | not sure | _____ |
| 12. Access to the Maine statutes | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | not sure | _____ |
| 13. Access to committee schedules (for public hearings and worksessions) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | not sure | _____ |
| 14. E-mail capability (meaning the ability to send electronic notes to other legislators, staff and constituents) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | not sure | _____ |
| 15. Access to the Internet | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | not sure | _____ |
| 16. Access to word processing and other software | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | not sure | _____ |
| 17. Ability to receive or send faxes via computer | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | not sure | _____ |

We would like to have an idea of your current status as a user of technology, in order to better understand potential training needs.

18. Do you currently have a computer in your home? _____ If so, what type of computer do you have? _____

19. Do you currently have a computer in your business? _____ If so, what type of computer do you have? _____

20. Do you currently have access to the Internet from your home or business? Yes No

21. How would you rate your level of comfort with computers?

- Very comfortable
- Comfortable
- Somewhat uncomfortable
- Not comfortable at all

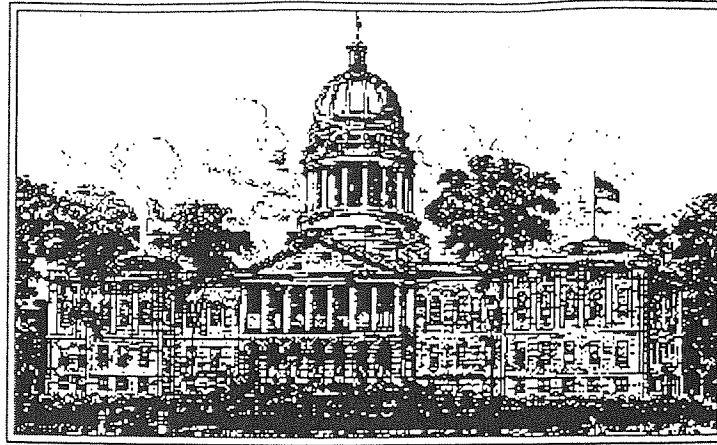
22. Is there anything else you would like to tell us regarding computers, access to information or other technology issues?

Thank you very much for your time.

Please return the survey, **no later than Friday, December 6, 1996**, to Roy Lenardson at 13 State House Station, Office of Policy and Legal Analysis Augusta, Maine 04333

If you have any questions please contact Roy Lenardson at 287-1670

or by E-mail at roy.lenardson@state.me.us



Welcome to the Maine State Legislature

Your Legislature

Calendar of Events

**Maine Constitution
and Laws**

**Visiting Your
State House**

Bill Information

Other Sites of Interest

Maine State Homepage

Other State Legislatures

Judicial Branch

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