MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

LEGISLATIVE BILL STATUS SYSTEM

STUDY REPORT

October 3, 1973



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I. Background.

With the increasing complexity of State problems, today's Legislators need more information than can possibly be provided by limited staff and conventional methods of research. The quality of their performance depends to a large degree on the availability of accurate information and upon their ability to use it within prescribed time limits. To this end, the computer's speed, its accuracy, its unlimited ability to safely store and recall information and an immense number of other possibilities, can be of invaluable assistance to Legislators in meeting their needs.

The application of computer technology in American State Legislatures has become wide spread in the last decade in an attempt to bring about a speedier, more informative Legislative operation.

Nine Legislative applications have been widely employed in the development of computer-supported services by the various States, - they are:

- 1. Status of pending legislation.
- 2. Statutory retrieval.
- 3. Bill drafting and statutory revision.
- 4. Legislative histories.
- 5. Index of pending legislation.
- 6. Digest of bill contents.
- 7. Fiscal-budgetary information.
- 8. Legislative printing.
- 9. Electromechanical voting.

I. Background. Cont'd.

The status of these informational systems in their various stages of development is as follows:

STATE LEGISLATURE COMPUTERIZED APPLICATIONS

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¹ May include legislative history, index to bills, bill digests.

Contract for House system signed January 1972,

As the State of Maine is one of those States which has not utilized computer technology in its Legislative operation, its Legislative Council recognized while a number of various computer applications would be eventually feasible, a bill status system appears to be the logical first step. The Council, therefore, authorized the following survey and test of such a system at this first special session of the 106th Legislature.

I. Background. Cont'd.

Use of a computer to maintain the status of legislation is now implemented in twenty-six states in the nation. Sufficient time has not been available to research the development of these systems to determine why the use of a computer was introduced. A table, a copy of which is attached as Addendum A, has been prepared to indicate some characteristics of states now using a computer for this process.

As the maintenance of a system to track bill status is a skilled clerical function, these processes often can be handled quite effectively by a computer. Legislative Staff assigned to the research function became interested in the application of computer technology as an aid to the legislative process. Contact was made with Central Computer Services and this resulted in joint research. Although the research was limited in scope, it indicated that a system for maintaining the status of legislation appears to be the logical first step in the development of a Legislative Information System. Properly designed, it can provide a useful management tool to legislative leadership in addition to providing the normal services to the individual legislator, general public and other interested parties.

Further interest in the automating of bill status information was stimulated by reports provided in the last legislative session by the University of Maine through the Office of Paul Dunham, Director of Institutional Research.

In the conduct of the study information was obtained from the following sources:

Office of the Secretary of the Senate
Office of the Clerk of the House
Office of Legislative Research
Legislative Assistants
Law and Legislative Reference Library

I. Cont'd.

Legislative Finance Office

Executive Department, Office of Administration

Finance and Administration, Bureau of Budget

II. Problem Definition - The current system appears to be adequate to handle inquiries regarding the current and historical information on bills. It requires a weekly effort of two legislative clerks approximately sixty hours each during the legislative session. In high activity occurrences other clerks also provide assistance, but time requirements are difficult to determine. To be able to adequately respond to inquiries it is necessary for manual cross indexes to be maintained. Among these indexes are a Subject Index, L. D. Index to Senate Paper or House Paper, Index for Each Committee, and an Index of Legislation by Sponsor.

Activity by type against the current system appears to be as follows:

General Public	40%
Legislators	40%
Legislative Staff	9%
State Departments	9%
Lobbyists	2%

Although the general public is 40% of the activity they represent 70% of time necessary to respond. Inquiries by other types are more knowledgeable on identifying the specific bills for which information is required.

The major problems with the present system appear to be the maintenance of the same level of service with present staff and equipment and the lack of backup, if a catastrophic event occurs. According to staff maintaining the present system, the volume of inquiries is increasing dramatically with each

II. Cont'd.

session. Public awareness and interest in the legislative process is the major reason. The present machine now in use is a serial machine and can handle only one inquiry at a time. The capacity of the machine will be exceeded some time in the near future. Current staff are in definite need for space and recognize the need for additional manpower, if demands continue to grow.

If, for any reason, the current documents on the docket machine were destroyed (fire, theft, etc.) the legislative process would be seriously disrupted. Man weeks of effort would be required to duplicate the records.

Another problem identified was that all activity of the Legislature is not accounted for in the present system. House and Sénate Orders not requiring concurrence are not entered into the docket. This creates the need for additional manual recording and also creates a problem in accountability and research.

The present system also creates a duplication of effort in the recording and maintaining of information. Nine separate Subject Indexes were identified and at least five of these are maintained by legislative staff performing various functions. It appears that a consolidation of these functions could be easily accomplished. Although one of the benefits would be a reduction in effort, the major benefit would be the establishment of consistency in classification of the Subject Index.

Another problem identified was the lack of ability, without a substantial increase in staff, to manipulate the data now contained in the system. Management reporting possibilities are numerous, but economically prohibitive as all reporting would have to be produced using manual methods.

If the present docket system is to serve the Legislature effectively, it should be in a more central location as it would be more convenient to the Legislators, Public, Lobby, etc. It also needs more space.

- II. Cont'd.

 If the docket is to be a backup system for the computer, then the two must be together. It would almost be humanly impossible to provide both if the two were in opposite areas of the building.
- III. Objectives As a result of the analysis of the current system, the following objectives are proposed:
 - 1. The new system should satisfy the increased activity demand without requiring additional staff or space. The time required to answer an inquiry should be reduced by a minimum of 50%.
 - 2. Adequate backup should be designed so that no catastrophic occurrence created by the absence of a Bill Status System would hamper the activities of the Legislature.
 - 3. The system should account for all documents introduced into the Legislative process.
 - 4. The information contained in the system should include items necessary to respond to inquiries now provided by the current system. It should also include information that will provide legislative leadership with management reports designed to identify problem areas that contribute to additional session days.
 - 5. The system should be responsive to the requirements of legislative staff responsible for research and information functions.
 - IV. Scope In the investigative study additional requirements were identified.

 Bill drafting and statutory retrieval were mentioned by several parties.

 Other research applications were also identified. In order that the project be restricted to a manageable entity it is proposed that the scope be limited to the following:
 - 1. Current and historical bill status information.
 - .2. Development of a single Subject Index.
 - 3. Management information for leadership.

IV. Cont'd.

- 4. Financial information relative to legislative bills.
- 5. Titles affected by legislative bills.
- V. Alternative Approaches In some instances the alternative approaches relate to specific problem areas and these are addressed individually.
 - 1. Meeting increasing demand without degrading of services can be accomplished by the installation of an additional or improved docket machine that provides faster access to information. If an additional machine is installed it will probably require additional staff. An alternative to this would be to install computer terminals that are significantly faster and have no limit to the number of terminals that can access the docket information simultaneously. The terminals could also be located so that the inquiries could be made by the interested party without the aid of clerks maintaining the status information. A third alternative would be printed documents that indicate status as of a certain date. It is questionable as to the feasibility of this alternative as most inquiries (95%) are for the most current status.
 - 2. Backup in the event of a catastrophy would be accomplished by xeroxing the documents periodically and storing them in another location. Backup is automatically provided by the installation of a computer system. The status of the files is captured daily so that it can be reconstructed if a problem occurs. A facsimile of the file would be stored away from the computer center in case a catastrophic event should occur. The time required to duplicate the file is estimated at one minute per day. It is also possible to create printed records similar to those main-

- 2. Cont'd.
 - tained by the docket machine so that if a major computer disaster occurred, the docket machine could be put back into use immediately.
- 3. As it appears apparent that the current system does not lend itself to an economical manipulation of data two alternatives are proposed:
 - A. Install a system with telecommunications capations bility that would completely replace the current system.
 - B. Retain the current system, but supplement the system with a batch processing computer system that will produce the proposed management reports.
- VI. Recommended Approach It would be advantageous for the Maine State Legislature to install a telecommunications system and phase out the manual bill status system. Although a batch processing system could produce the reports, it would not solve other problems that have been identified. A batch system would also require a duplication of effort for maintaining the data necessary to produce the reports. It would be difficult for the same people to perform both functions and inconsistencies would undoubtedly occur. Extensive effort would be required to constantly cross-check the data in both systems, if a high degree of reliability and validity is to be maintained. If reliability is not maintained, --the usefulness of the system will seriously degrade as users of the system will not have confidence in the reports produced by the system.

The current system maintained by legislative staff is a 'real time' system

VI. Cont'd.

and this can be duplicated only by a telecommunications system. 'Real time' means that as action occurs, it is immediately entered into the system.

Docket Clerks now post information to the docket machine as the action occurs on the floor of the House or Senate. A batch processing system would not be responsive to this requirement as the maintenance of the data in the system would not be timely. In a 'batch' system data is usually collected manually, grouped together after a time period has elapsed, keypunched into machine readable form and submitted for computer processing.

Expected Benefits - One of the major benefits of a new system using computer VII.technology would be that the information in the system could be easily manipulated to produce reports for management and control. Bottlenecks in the legislative process could easily be identified by exception reporting and leadership could take action on these problems. Exception reporting eliminates the need to review all of the legislation and only those matters of immediate concern are identified. An example of this type of reporting would be bills that have had a public hearing and have not been reported out of committee after tem days have expired. Statistical reports could also be developed indicating by committee the average number of days required to get bills into committee, through public hearing and referred out of committee. The scope of reporting would be limited only by the data in the system. It will be possible to reduce clerical effort now necessary to maintain the current system. Cross-reference indexes now maintained manually can be automatically generated by the computer. It does not appear that any reduction in staff will be realized, but increases in staff to maintain the current level of service can be avoided. Reporting now done manually can also be eliminated and should result in an increased level of service.

VII. Cont'd.

The system will also provide the ability to increase the level of service to other areas, if the Legislature feels it is necessary or desirable.

Terminals can be located in any area that will provide immediate access to the information. The system will be designed in such a manner that anyone who can follow simple directions will be able to use the terminal to access the information in the system. Screen displays will indicate information on current status of legislation and also can be used to indicate the committee assigned, hearing date time and room numbers of the committee. The information should be retrievable by L. D. Number, House or Senate Paper Number or subject. It could also include all the legislation being heard by each committee on a specific day.

The system would also provide protection against a catastrophic occurrence. The status of legislation would be saved at the end of each working day and information necessary to completely recreate the system would be transferred to a safe storage location. Periodically printed output would be produced that would allow the manual system now being used to be reinstated with a minimum of effort.

Currently, the information contained in the docket is destroyed prior to the new session. For a cost of approximately \$20, all the information could be retained and made available for research purposes. The storage requirements would be minimal as all the information could be stored on a single reel of magnetic tape.

Another benefit that could be built into the system that appears to have

VII. Con'td.

merit is a Title and Section Cross-reference Index. As legislation is introduced, a file would be established that would indicate titles and sections affected. If four L. D.'s were revising the same title and section, it would be known immediately and research could be made to determine if passage would result in errors and inconsistencies.

Serious consideration should also be given to including financial information in the system. During the legislative session the State Budget Office requires the effort of more than one full-time person to maintain financial information associated with bills that are introduced. The Legislative Finance Office also maintains information and it appears that the information might also be of use to that office. Further analysis will be required to determine the significance of the inclusion of financial information, but the establishment of a data base would make this possible.

The Register of Bills and Resolves is a manual research problem to prepare for printing. If the system is properly designed, this document would be ready for printing the day following the close of the legislative session.

Many weeks of effort are now required to accomplish this task.

The system would also provide the Legislature with experience in the use of computers in the legislative process at a minimum expense. Computer technology can be a tremendous management aid, but there are disciplines not associated with manual systems, Exposure to both the benefits and disciplines should be valuable in determining to what extent a computer should be used in the legislative process.

VIII. Existing System Flowchart and Narrative.

See Attachment - Addendum B

IX. Generalized System Design Work Plan - Phase II

Task	Man Days	Completion Date
Report Design		
Screen Displays	G	20/21/73
Printed Reports	5	10/05/73
Determine Data Base and Master File Requirements	3	10/19/73
Determine Required Input	2	10/26/73
Prepare Generalized Design	5	10/24/73
Operating Cost Estimate	Z	10/25/73
Project Work Plan for Detailed Design	2	10/26/73
Project Cost Estimate	Z	10/26/73
Report Writing	3	10/31/73

X. Generalized System Design Cost Estimate - Phase II

No direct costs will be incurred for this effort. Staff time will be provided

by personnel available to Central Computer Services.

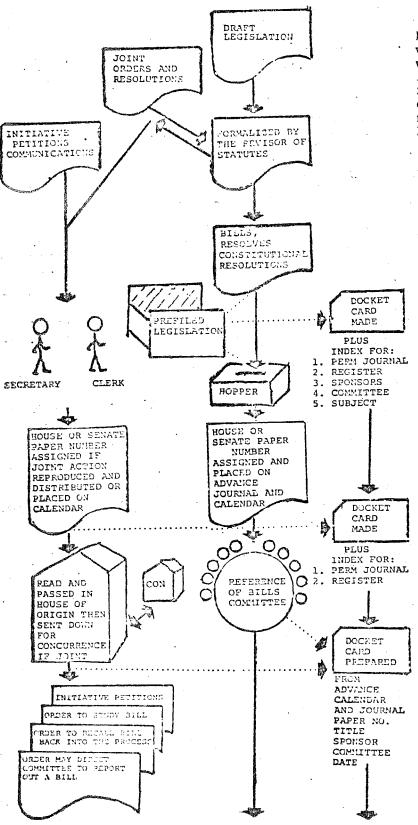
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By: David Silsby, Assistant Director

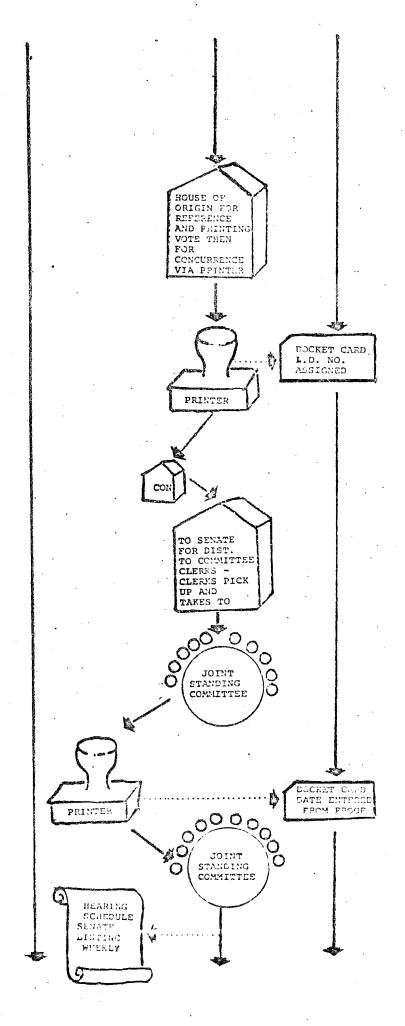
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THE LEGISLATIVE DOCKET PROCESS IN MAINE

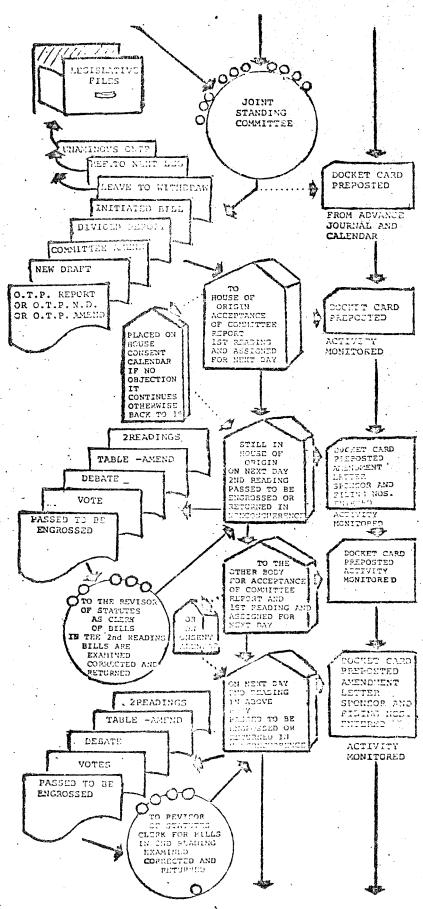
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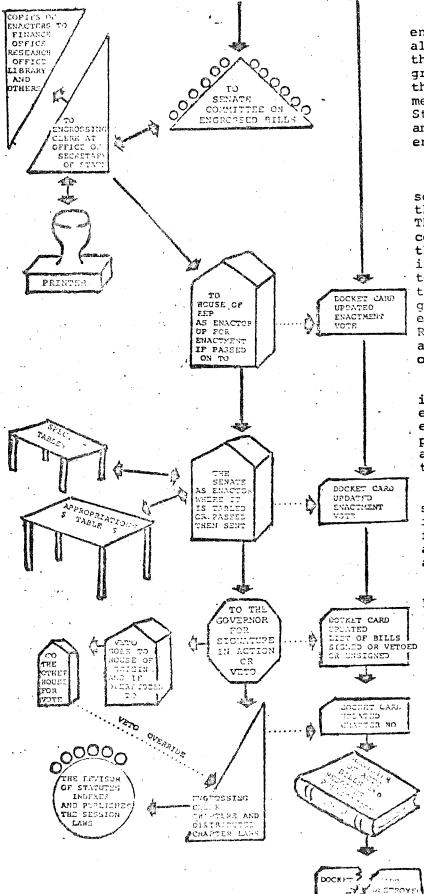
- (1) The legislative process begins with a desired objective which is usually reduced to writing in the form of draft legislation, petition, order, resolution, communication or other instrument to bring the matter before the legislative body.
- (2) If the objective involves statutory changes, it is formally prepared in a legislative sponsor's name by the Revisor of Statutes and held in confidence for introduction by the sponsor.
- (3) Bills, Resolves and Constitutional Resolutions may be pre-filed under the legislative rules prior to the session once prepared and sponsored. Docket entries made upon pre-filing.
- (4) When the session convenes, legislators submit requests for formally prepared and titled instruments. Upon completion by the Revisor of Statutes, these are signed and delivered to the Senate and House hoppers.
- (5) Orders, Resolutions and Memorials are also drawn or checked for form by the Revisor of Statutes, then signed and delivered to the respective Clerk or Secretary. Docket entries are made upon final disposition.
- (6) All Joint Papers received by the Clerk or Secretary, and Bills, Resolves and Constitutional Resolutions removed from the legislative hoppers are given a paper number.
- (7) Bills, Resolves and Constitutional Resolutions are sent to Reference of Bills Committee for assignment to Joint Standing Committees.



- (8) Orders, Resolutions and Communications are placed on the Advance Journal and Calendar or are reproduced and distributed. Then they are read and passed in house of origin and sent down for concurrence. Copies are then printed and distributed as directed.
- (9) Orders may direct a Joint Standing Committee to report out a bill or recall a bill from the legislative files or order that a study of a bill be made and reported back, to name a few such uses.
- (10) Bills, etc., are placed on the Advance Journal and Calendar. Reference and Printing are then voted in house of origin and sent down for concurrence via the printer. (Possible rereference here or later possible return as noncurrent matter or other holdup for agreement.
- (11) Commercial printing usually takes 3 days. The printer assigns legislative document number and returns list of assigned numbers to docket. Also posted from LD themselves.
- (12) Printer returns printed LD which goes to the opposite body for concurrence on printing referral.
- (13) If concurrence is given, LD goes to Senate for distribution to committee clerks and delivery to the referred committee.
- (14) Once in committee, a bill is received, hearing date is established and room assigned. The committee then authorizes publication of legal notice of such action.
- (15) Committee clerks prepare forms authorizing publication and delivers such to state printer.
- (16) The state printer returns proof of notice 10 to 14 days before hearing date and upon approval publishes such notice in the newspapers.
- (17) A docket entry is made upon return of notice of proof.
- (18) Incidental to the process, the Senate compiles a list of hearings one week in advance. Available in Senate Office for public distribution.



- (19) Committees hold public hearings. (Sometimes rescheduled steps 13 through 16 repeated)
- (20) Committee meets executively and decides a course of action for each bill and delivers such report and bill to the respective hoppers.
- (21) The committee report is then placed on the Advance Journal and Calendar and preposted from that on the docket for later monitoring.
- (22) Bills or Resolves may be changed in committee by amendment, new draft or other recommendation which is sent to house of origin for acceptance of the report and first reading, then assigned for 2nd reading unless rules are Bills or Resolves suspended. killed in committee go to legislative files. All committee reports are preposted from the Advance Journal and Calendar then monitored for correction.
- (23)The House maintains a Consent Calendar for noncontroversial measures. If no objection, such matters are placed on the Calendar for the first day, then the second, then passed to be engrossed as a group and sent down for concurrence. If objection or money involved or bill amended, it reverts back as if a report of committee (19). Consent Calendar action is posted daily at the end of the session. (Date entry the previous night)
- (24) Following each of 2 readings in each house, bills with accompanying amendments, are passed to be engrossed and sent to the Revisor of Statutes as bills in the 2nd reading for examination, correction and return for delivery to the other body to repeat the same steps of this process. All activity is preposted, then monitored for corrections.
- (25) If troubles result later on in the process and amendments needed, a bill must be backed up to point where it is passed to be engrossed and amendment added.
- (26) Disagreeing action may place a bill in legislative files. However, it can be recalled to its previous status by order.



- (27) Upon passage to be engrossed by both branches, all bills and resolves go to the Senate Committee on Engrossed Bills for examination, then to the Engrossing Department of the Secretary of State's Office to integrate amendments into the bill and engrossment.
- (28) The Engrossing Clerk sends the bill as arranged, to the printer and proofs his work. The printer supplies 40 soft copies and 10 hard copies of the engrossed bill and Engrossing Clerk reports such bills to Committee on Engrossed Bills to be truly and strictly engrossed and then sends the engrossed bill to the House of Representatives for first enactment. Docket is updated on enactment and vote.
- (29) This entire process is often stepped up at the end of the session by preengrossing, which is anticipation of amendments prior to actual action and printing the same before the fact.
- (30) If enacted in the House, sent to the Senate where it is held on one of several tables for funding determinations among others, or immediate enactment.
- (31) Enacted bills are taken by the Secretary of the Senate to the Governor for signing, veto or inaction.
- (32) Vetoes are sustained or overridden by vote in the house of origin, then in the other body.
- (33) Following enactment and signing into law, bills are chaptered by Engrossing Clerk and published as session laws by the Revisor of Statutes.
- (34) The Clerk of the House publishes history of all bills and resolves and destroys docket.