



Chicago's City Council is Ready for a Reorg and New Members Should Have Their Say

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In a city long dominated by its mayor, the legislative branch is showing signs of independence: At a press conference held before the Wednesday, March 15 meeting of City Council, a group of alderpersons announced their intent to call a special session for the purpose of modifying the body's rules and committee structure.

The Better Government Association and the [League of Women Voters of Chicago](#) strongly urge a robust and public discussion of potential changes, with the adoption of any formal rules and committee assignments left until after the newly and re-elected Council members take their seats in May.

Both our organizations have [publicly expressed their support for a more independent City Council](#), including the Council's exercise of its existing authority to name its own leadership and committee structure. However, with elections ongoing and some runoffs still undecided, now is not the time for incumbent alderpersons to establish the rules by which their soon-to-be colleagues will be bound. The newly elected representatives deserve their seat at the table.

Among proposed changes to Council's rules, an increase in the number of committees requires serious consideration and debate. City Council spends more than \$5 million per year on its staffing, nearly all of which goes to committees — some of which have rarely met during the past four years. Staff hiring and duties are left to the discretion of the individual committee chairs, creating resource disparities between members of council and contributing to the ongoing perception of leadership as a perk rather than an administrative responsibility. Adding more committees without reforming Council's staffing structure is a recipe for corruption and waste.

Our organizations also have concerns with a proposed reduction in the maximum size of most committees from twenty to thirteen, which at the minimum quorum could allow legislation to be passed out of committee with as few as four votes.

The Better Government Association and the League of Women Voters urge a substantive and thoughtful discussion of Council's proposed new rules and committees as part of the new council's first month of business. Proposals introduced at the inaugural session should be publicly

debated and amended in the Committee on Rules before a final floor vote. Allowing newly-elected members to participate fully and ensuring that all new proposals have a substantive public discussion prior to any final vote will help ensure that a more independent City Council is also one committed to reform and deserving of the public trust.

The Better Government Association is a 99-year-old civic watchdog that seeks better government through investigative journalism, policy reforms and civic engagement efforts that lead to more open, equitable and accountable government. The policy team and investigative unit operate independently of one another, while both seek to advance the cause of better government in Chicago and across Illinois.

The League of Women Voters of Chicago is a nonpartisan, grassroots organization working to protect and expand voting rights and ensure everyone is represented in our democracy. We empower voters and defend democracy through advocacy and education. The League of Women Voters of Chicago encourages informed and active participation in government while influencing public policy. We never endorse or oppose political parties or candidates, but we are political.