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**POLITICS**

## Ohio House adopts new rules that some say dampen transparency

by: [Natalie Fahmy](#)

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COLUMBUS, Ohio ([WCMH](#)) — Ohio House members of the [136th General Assembly](#) have adopted new rules that will make it more difficult to know what is on the [House floor ahead of voting](#).

At the start of each general assembly, once [new leadership is sworn in](#), each chamber must approve rules, which govern their body.

“This resolution is not the most exciting we are going to deal with this general assembly,

but it is one of t... ..most important," Representative Brian Stewart (R-Ashville) said. "The changes to these rules, in virtually every instance, I think it's important to note, take us back to rules that have existed in this form in a prior general assembly."

House Democrats attempted to amend the rules several times, none of their suggestions actually ever got a vote before House rules were approved.

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### **No more 24-Hour Notice of House Schedule**

Last general assembly, House members on the Rules and Reference committee met at least 24-hours ahead of time to set the floor schedule. Now, that committee will meet to set the agenda the same day of session, just hours before votes begin.

Representative Dani Isaacsohn (D-Cincinnati) attempted to amend the rule before it was approved, to revert it back to the decade-old policy of 24-hour notice.

"And that notice is not just for us, that notice is for the public to know what the people's house is doing and to have advance notice about their own thoughts and feelings about it, to gather, to figure it out," he said. "That is what breathes life in the freedoms of expression and the freedoms to come together and advocate. The process matters."

"This specific rule just reverts the rule back to the 130th general assembly rule and it provides a little more flexibility for this chamber to be able to operate on a day-to-day basis," Representative Josh Williams (R-Sylvania) said. "We're simply going back to the normal order of business."

Still, Isaacsohn argued that this is a nonpartisan issue, and all members want to know what will be on the floor ahead of time.

"It has nothing to do with the substance of the bills themselves," Isaacsohn said. "It just about allowing us as members to do our jobs or effectively."

But Williams, who is a member of Republican leadership said that each Ohio House member can track and see what bills are reported out of committee, making any of those eligible for a floor vote.

“Every member here can see the bills that have been voted out of committee, and that means [those bills] are eligible to come to session,” Williams said.

When House members do not want to vote on an amendment, they vote to “lay it on the table.” This amendment was laid on the table with nearly all Republicans supporting the motion to do so.

## **“Cinderella Rule” Eliminated**

A deadline, often referred to as the “Cinderella rule,” within the Ohio Statehouse, requires that amendments for bills be filed 24 hours ahead of time.

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Now, that rule is axed, and members will be able to file amendments up until one-hour before session begins.

“It reverts back to a rule that existed for decades prior the 135th general assembly,” Williams said. “It allows for efficiency within the legislative process to allow for amendments to be proposed.”

Democratic members argued that this rule will make it so both the public, and House members, will not have adequate knowledge of the legislation is it is to be amended.

“Maintaining the midnight deadline for amendments is crucial to ensuring transparency, accountability and thorough deliberation in the legislative process,” Representative Michele Grim (D-Toledo) said. “The public and stakeholders who have engaged in advocacy and will be deeply impacted by legislation deserve opportunity to know what will happen in the committee where the legislative work is really done.”

This amendment was laid on the table, 59-33.

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### Public Access to the House Chamber

Ohio House Speaker Matt Huffman (R-Lima) is also tightening security at the House chambers.

Moving forward, the half an hour before session and a half an hour after session, the lobby outside the chamber will be closed to anyone except those who have floor privileges.

“There’s one story I had about a lobbyist blocking the door, demanding to know how [members are] going to vote,” Huffman said.

Huffman said it is both a safety and efficiency issue. And said if session starts at 2PM, for example, members of the public will be able to file into the gallery at 1:45.

“If you want to start session on time, you can’t have half a dozen people or more out there yakking about the next bill,” Huffman said. “So that’s part of it, too, starting on time. It’s a matter of it being orderly, I think.”

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House Democrats also argued, that for bills that are reported out of committee the day before session, or morning of session, the one-hour requirement to file amendments should be waived.

This rule would align with an Ohio Senate rule.

“Why should that bill be free from any amendments just because it is a scheduling problem,” Isaacsohn said. “I think there is a reason the senate does it that way, a good reason, a compelling reason.”

This amendment was also laid on the table, with a 60-32 vote, after Williams argued that it

would hinder transparency.

"I believe that for transparency purpose and for all members to be adequately prepared for session, that that time period should not be waived," Williams said.

"This is in the interest in transparency," Isaacsohn said. "It is neither inherently positive nor inherently negative whether something is reverting back to something prior. That is not a reason for or against something, that is just an additional fact. But on the merits, I believe this makes a lot of sense."

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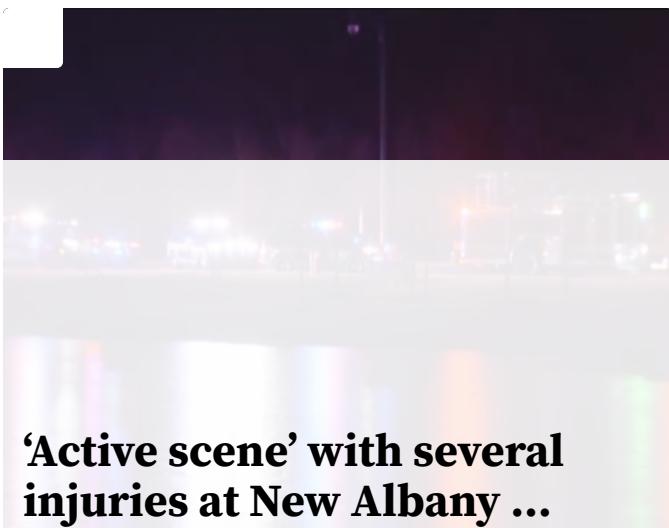
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