

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 38

INTRODUCED BY J. KARLEN

A JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MONTANA REQUESTING AN INTERIM STUDY OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS; AND REQUIRING THAT THE FINAL RESULTS OF THE STUDY BE REPORTED TO THE 70TH LEGISLATURE.

WHEREAS, the Montana Legislature's ongoing effort to modernize and secure its databases and website offers opportunities for increasing public access and lowering barriers to participation; and

WHEREAS, the recent website redesign and timing of its launch posed challenges for the public, legislators, lobbyists, and staff; and

WHEREAS, since the Montana Legislature has adopted the increased involvement opportunities offered by online participation, the public participation process could be examined to ensure consistency and accessibility; and

WHEREAS, Montanans with disabilities need access to both online and in-person meetings and other activities of the Legislature as well as access to reasonable accommodations to ensure the legislative process is accessible to all.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

That the Legislative Council be requested to designate an appropriate interim committee or statutory committee, pursuant to section 5-5-217, MCA, to review public participation in the legislative process. The study should:

(1) examine challenges and successes with the Montana Legislature's new website and bill tracking system, including but not limited to determining the differences in functionality and accessibility between the old and new websites and priorities for improving the website for the interim and the 2027 legislative session;

(2) assess methods to facilitate and manage public and constituent messages on legislation and to legislators, including but not limited to:

(a) a review of best practices implemented by other legislative bodies to facilitate and track public comments;

(b) a review of how legislators used the public comment feature on the legislator portal; and

(c) an analysis of rates of duplicate public comments received through the legislator portal;

(3) identify improvements or additions that could increase public access to, involvement in, and comprehension of the legislative process, including but not limited to:

(a) a review of variations in public testimony procedures between committees; and

(b) identifying discrepancies between bill explorer, committee explorer, bill tracker, reports, and other scheduling tools; and

(4) evaluate how to mitigate participation barriers for Montanans with disabilities.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the committee solicit feedback widely, including through surveys, if possible, on current processes and ideas for improvements or modifications from stakeholders, including the public, legislators, House and Senate staff, lobbyists, members of the disability rights community, and any other stakeholder the committee finds relevant.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that all aspects of the study, including presentation and review requirements, be concluded prior to September 15, 2026.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the final results of the study, including any findings, conclusions, comments, or recommendations of the appropriate committee, be reported to the 70th Legislature.

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