



## DEPUTIES OF COLOR

### Statement in Opposition to the proposed Rules of Order for the 81<sup>st</sup> General Convention

August 12, 2023

To: ++Michael, Julia, Rachel+, the Executive Office of the General Convention, the Joint Standing Committee on Planning and Arrangements, the Special Committee on the Rules of Order of the House of Deputies, all members of Executive Council, all bishops, priests, deacons, Deputies to the 81<sup>st</sup> General Convention, and all those faithful who call the Episcopal Church their faith community:

Dear Friends,

President of the House the Deputies Julia Ayala Harris announced in her April 2023 House of Deputies Newsletter that she had appointed a Special Committee on Rules of Order to review and recommend potential changes to the Rules of Order for the House of Deputies for the 81<sup>st</sup> General Convention. This committee has now issued a draft [set of proposals](#).

***Succinctly stated, the proposed rule changes would fundamentally change how legislative committees function such as:***

- ***Making all committee work entirely online which would require the work of the legislative committees to be completed before arriving at General Convention;***
- ***The rules would eliminate the ability for deputies and legislative committees to propose resolutions up to the 2nd legislative day of General Convention, requiring that all resolutions must be received 90 days prior to the 1st legislative days of the General Convention.***

For the reasons stated below, the Deputies of Color Steering Committee respectfully disagrees with the proposed set of rules. We therefore urge all deputations (and bishops) to read the proposed rules and plan to attend a hearing scheduled for September 8, 2023, at 3:00 p.m. ET, as these proposals would have a major impact on the functioning of the General Convention. **[Register here](#)** to attend the hearing and to testify.

While we certainly support streamlining the legislative process and making General Convention and all governance more efficient, and while we also support allowing virtual hearings so that people who cannot be at General Convention can participate and provide testimonies, efficiency is not always effective. This the General Convention acknowledged when it rejected the full scope of the TREC proposals at the 2015 General Convention. We believe there is a strong value in deliberating these resolutions in person at General Convention.

We cannot legislate without relationship and discernment in community, and we do not believe Zoom is the best platform to allow that kind of relationship-building and discernment to take place.

We believe we can do some legislative committee work in advance, but it should not replace the ability to meet in person. We are incarnational people. In a post-pandemic world, there is a deep hunger for in-person relationship building. We need to have the ability to build relationship and discern as a community. As one of our deputies most brilliantly put it: "To limit no late resolution is to stifle the work of the Holy Spirit. Sorry God, if you have something to say to the church and you want to participate in our governance, please do so 90 days before the first legislative day."

This proposal is too draconian. These changes would remove discretion from legislative committees to propose a new resolution if a pressing issue arises, or to remove an item from the consent calendar if the need for debate is clear. Legislative committees have track record of careful discernment. This proposal would put undue power in the hands of the Committee on Dispatch at the expense of the committees where so many deputies serve. In addition, General Convention often coincides with the final sessions of the U.S. Supreme Court before the summer recess which would not allow our legislative committees to respond, if need be, based on the new proposed Rules of Order. These proposed rules would also not allow the General Convention to address other new issues that may arise near the time of or at General Convention.

These proposals would also create an undue burden on deputies ahead of convention. One of our deputies reflected that at the last General Convention, he/she served as an officer for a legislative committee that received a large volume of resolutions, and he/she felt like he/she was in a perpetual General Convention between April and July. Most clerical deputies have congregational or non-parochial responsibilities, and most lay deputies have full-time non-church jobs. Many deputies also have family responsibilities. If we adopt a model of completing all legislative committee work prior to General Convention, our church governance will be available to those who are privileged to take significant time off over many months, but it will exclude many others, including deputies of color who have worked for decades to gain a place at the table. This deputy was able to carry those responsibilities by putting many long hours at work to make up time and doing the committee work till one o'clock in the morning, after their job and childcare responsibilities were completed. Undoubtedly, other officers faced the same challenges.

We note that three out of five of the special committee members are not deputies. One is the parliamentarian, one is a GCO staff member, and another is the chancellor for the PHOD. Most of them work in some capacity for the church. We believe they are dismissing too quickly the workload concerns raised by lay deputies in the evaluation of the convention held in Baltimore.

Finally, we are at a loss for ascertaining the procedural mechanics which would allow several of these proposed changes to be retroactively applied if they are passed at General Convention to allow virtual hearing. Typically, we vote on the House Rules on the first legislative day and those rules govern the entire General Convention. Last convention, the Committee on Planning and Arrangements had to vote on allowing virtual hearings to take place because of the pandemic and we retroactively voted to accept those changes at General Convention. This should not be the norm moving forward. Moreover, there is lack of clarity on how these proposed rules would change the legislative committee process for the House of Bishops to mirror the process at the House of Deputies.

For the above stated reasons, we the Deputies of Color cannot support the rules as proposed. Therefore, we urge that the current Rules of Order remain in place to govern the work of the 81<sup>st</sup> General Convention, or that the proposed Rules of Order as put forth by the Special Committee be modified to reflect the concerns raised within this letter.

Respectfully submitted,

**The Steering Committee for the Deputies of Color to  
The 81<sup>st</sup> General Convention**

**Convener:**

Joe McDaniel, Jr.

**Asian/Pacific Islander Caucus:**

Ryan Kusumoto

Alan Murray

Canon Barbara Okamoto Bach

Heidi Kim

**Black Caucus:**

Canon Noreen Duncan

Louis Glosson

**Indigenous Caucus:**

Minnie Steele

The Rev. Michael Sells

**Latino Caucus**

Wendy Cañas