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October 14, 2022

To: Chair Michelle Harris and Members of the Rules Committee

Re: R2022-687, Amendment of City Council Rules of Order and Procedure by modifying Rule 41 regarding requirements for direct introductions into City Council committees

Dear Chair Harris and Alders:

The League of Women Voters of Chicago urges that the referenced matter be placed on the agenda for a Rules Committee meeting this month. We also urge that all members vote to approve this amendment to Rule 41, and then again vote to approve the item at the following City Council meeting.

This proposed amendment, if passed, is a significant step in providing more transparency to and improving the workings of the Committees and City Council. This should result in better government for the people of Chicago.

Under this amendment, any item directly introduced to a Committee will need to be publicly posted at least 48 hours prior to the Committee meeting. The item will also need to be transmitted to all Council members by that same deadline with an impartial and unbiased summary of the item. In addition, attached to the item must be a statement explaining the urgency as to why the item is being directly introduced, rather than going through the normal process of being introduced at a Council meeting and then referred to a Committee.

This will mean that the public will have an opportunity to see the text of the item before the Committee meeting is held, as well as prior to the Council taking action – in contrast to what happens in many instances currently. Often the text of these direct introduction items is not posted and there is no record number listed with the vague description of the item that appears on the Committee agenda. The result is that the summary of the meeting that is presented as part of the agenda of the next City Council meeting does not contain the record number and the public again cannot look up the text of the item before the full Council acts.

Moreover, this proposed amendment will provide much needed time for the Alders to review direct introduction items. The League has learned from a number of different Alders that far too often they are receiving the text of such direct introduction items shortly before the Committee meetings. By requiring at least 48 hours' notice for all Alders, this should result in the Alders having time to consider the items more carefully, raise questions that should be asked, and then take a more informed vote. This will benefit all the people of Chicago.

The League notes that the minimum 48 hours' notice provided for in the amendment is still not sufficient for the public to be able to read and provide input to the Alders prior to the Committee meeting. This is because the notices of the posting of such direct introduction items are not sent out from the Legistar system until the early morning hours the day after the posting. This means that the public will normally not become aware of the items until after the deadlines for submitting written comments to the Committee and for requesting to make verbal comments at the meeting. We therefore hope that most of these direct introduction items and agendas will be posted well in advance of the minimum 48 hours' prior notice.

However, the minimum notice of 48 hours will still provide some time for the public to contact their Alders prior to the Council meeting if the item is submitted for approval by the Committee to the Council. Members of the public can also seek to testify at the Council meeting.

Moreover, the addition of the requirement that a statement explaining the urgency which necessitates the use of direct introduction should mean that the use of the direct introduction process occurs only when there truly is a need which justifies the reduced ability of the public to provide input.

We thank Alderman Reilly (42nd) and co-sponsors Tunney (44th), Osterman (48th), Waguespack (32nd), Vasquez, Jr. (40th), Taliaferro (29th), La Spata (1st), Hadden (49th), and Martin (47th) for submitting this proposal.

We also thank all of you for considering the League's comments. Again, the League is urging that (1) this good government measure be placed on a Rules Committee agenda this month, (2) that the Rules Committee approve this good government measure, and (3) that the Council then pass this good government measure.

Yours truly,
Jane Ruby, President