

Branch bylaws: meetings



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Each year, the Committee of Laws rules on hundreds of submissions from branches for proposed changes to their bylaws. As chair of the Committee of Laws, it is my job to review the proposed bylaws and then make recommendations to the full committee. With so many submissions, common problems with proposed language become apparent. So, to help branches get that required stamp of approval, here are some of the common issues the committee sees that pertain to branch meetings:

- **Regular branch meetings**—Article 3, Section 1 of the *Constitution for the Government of Subordinate and Federal Branches (CGSFB)* states that regular meetings of the branch shall be at “such time and place as may be designated in the branch by-laws.” Long-standing presidential rulings have held that this language requires that both the date and the hour of the meeting be specifically designated in the branch bylaws (i.e., the third Monday of each month at 7 p.m. or the 10th of each month at 6 p.m.). Often the committee receives branch bylaws where the date and the hour of the meeting are not designated—which is in conflict with the *CGSFB*.
- **Who presides at meetings**—Article 3, Section 5 of the *CGSFB* contains the provisions for who can preside at branch meetings. This section was amended by the delegates at the 2012 national convention. Previously, Article 3, Section 5 of the *CGSFB* only provided that, in the absence of the president and vice president, any member in good standing could be elected to preside at a branch meeting by a majority of those present. This language still remains, but another option for branches was adopted: a provision that they may designate in their bylaws one or more officers to preside in the absence of the president and vice president. Either provision is acceptable for a branch to have in its bylaws; however, if the branch wishes for another officer to preside in the absence of the president and vice president, then those officers must be specifically listed in the branch bylaws.
- **Special meetings**—Article 3, Section 2 of the *CGSFB* states: “Special meetings shall be called by the President upon the written request of ___ members (number to be determined by the Branch) in good standing or by vote of the Branch.” A common problem is proposed language that gives the branch president independent authority to call a special meeting. The *Constitution*

does not permit the president to call special meetings on his/her own authority. The same applies to the branch’s executive board or other officers.

- **Notice of special meetings**—Often the committee sees language that a branch will notify members about special meetings by a posting on a bulletin board. Long-standing presidential rulings have held that posting a notice on a station bulletin board is insufficient by itself because there is no guarantee that every member of the branch, particularly retirees, will see the bulletin board. When the committee sees language like this, we point out that the language may be in conflict because it appears it is the only notification the branch is currently providing. Again, the *Constitution* requires notification to all members of the branch. (See Article 3, Section 2 of the *CGSFB*.)
- **Quorum**—Article 3, Section 4 of the *CGSFB* states: “The Branch shall be called to order at the time prescribed in the by-laws if a quorum be present.” On occasion, the committee receives language that eliminates the requirement of a quorum. This is a conflict. Unless a quorum is present, a branch meeting may not come to order and conduct business. Another problem the committee encounters is proposed language that requires a branch quorum to consist of a certain number of officers before a meeting can be called to order. However, the *Constitution* does not authorize a branch to invalidate a branch meeting because no officer bothered to attend. When this occurs, any member in good standing may be elected by a majority of those present to preside at a meeting. (See Article 3, Section 5 of the *CGSFB*.)

Again, these are just a few of the common errors the Committee of Laws encounters when it comes to proposed language about branch meetings. To assist branches that may be considering revising their bylaws, the committee recommends that branches refer to the *CGSFB* as a guide. The *CGSFB* begins on page 66 of the *NALC Constitution*.

On another subject, I encourage all members to attend your regular branch meetings. These meetings provide a forum to voice concerns and debate issues. It is in this forum that the business of the branch is conducted and members provide direction on how the branch should proceed by voting on the issues before them. Branch meetings are also a great place to come together with sister and brother letter carriers to learn about the contract and keep informed on current events that could affect the Postal Service, you and even your family.

Other ways to stay informed include *The Postal Record*, nalc.org or the NALC Member App, if you have a compatible electronic device. You can find information for the app on nalc.org.