

Worth repeating



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First, my congratulations to all who have been elected or reelected this year to serve our membership. Whether your branch is big or small, it should always be an honor to serve our brothers and sisters as their representatives in the letter carrier craft. And I especially applaud the willingness and sacrifice of those who step up to represent their fellow co-workers. Ours is a thankless job, but there is satisfaction in knowing that we are upholding the dignity and respect of the hardest-working people in this country. Our members deserve representation reflective of their heavy labor, and

they know it. Because of that, they hold us accountable, and that is not a bad thing!

This month I will refer to a column I wrote two years ago about bylaw submissions that still holds true today, making it worth repeating. Hopefully someone will read this prior to the submission of any bylaw changes and make the necessary corrections. The following items are still the most common errors we come across as your Committee of Laws. So, whether your branch is considering bylaw changes or not, if any of these apply to your current bylaws, they should be amended.

The officers of the branch

This is found in Article 4, Section 1 of the *Constitution for the Government of Subordinate and Federal Branches (CGSFB)*. There is a common error here—not surprising, considering that there was a change at the Chicago convention in 2022. Every branch must have a Mutual Benefit Association (MBA) representative along with the other required officers. For smaller branches, this may require some of these positions to be combined, but the duties need to be accounted for in the bylaw. And if any of these positions are combined, this must be explicitly stated in the bylaws. The required officers are president, vice president, recording secretary, financial secretary, treasurer, sergeant at-arms, MBA representative, health benefits representative (aka an HBR) and trustees (three or five). If any of those listed positions are not among the elected officers of your branch, then your bylaws need to be amended.

Branch funds/Spending the branch money

You will find this in Article 12, Section 3 of the *CGSFB*. We consistently receive proposals that would allow the president, executive board, or another officer the power to authorize the spending of branch funds. This is a no-no! That section states: “[N]o appropriation shall be made except when ordered by a majority vote of the members present and voting at a regular meeting.” Officers may be allowed to spend the money between meetings, but this is limited to emergencies, and to an amount specified in the bylaws. Of course, this is outside the allocation for recurring bills, reimbursement or compensation. But that, too, needs to be specifically stipulated in the bylaws.

Sick relief and funeral benefits

This would fall under the “It has been in our bylaws forever!” category. Article 8 of the *CGSFB* states that branches may “make provisions in their bylaws for the payment of sick relief or funeral benefits,” yet it cannot make it mandatory for members to pay for it. Using the general fund to pay for such a program is essentially making it mandatory for all the members to finance it. This was a clarification or ruling initially provided by NALC President Vince Sombrotto and upheld by subsequent presidents. So, when we receive bylaws with any reference to automatically providing flowers or payment out of the general fund for sick relief or funeral benefits, it is flagged for being in conflict. Branches can still send flowers or donate funds upon the illness or death of a member or their family member, but it must be the will of the membership in attendance and voting at a regular meeting for each occurrence (remember Article 12.3?).

Approved with exception

When you receive a response from our committee informing you that a proposal or current bylaw provision is in conflict, the process of amending bylaws per Article 15 of the *NALC Constitution* must be followed. You cannot make changes based on our letter without following the amendment process. Whether it’s a matter of removing a provision by deletion or correcting some conflictual language, the process must be followed and resubmitted for approval. If you have any questions, you can just give me a call or email me at julion@nalc.org.

In closing, I wish all a happy Hanukkah, a joyous Kwanzaa and a prosperous new year. From my family to yours, *feliz Navidad!*