

**PARLIAMENTARY ORGANIZATION FORMED:
AMERICAN COLLEGE OF PARLIAMENTARY LAWYERS**

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According to Paul Mason, “Parliamentary law is law.” If so, the legal side of parliamentary procedure is not in the best shape. Scant attention is given in law schools to issues of meeting procedure. Few lawyers are members of the National Association of Parliamentarians or the American Institute of Parliamentarians, and even fewer credentialed. This is an unfortunate situation in that there have been an increasing number of parliamentary law issues over the past few years. The American Bar Association Model Nonprofit Corporation Act is being revised, and there are likely to be many procedural changes of a parliamentary nature. (And once a revision is approved by the ABA, states will consider whether to adopt the Model Act, with or without modifications.) Many states have adopted or are considering the adoption of statutes that prescribe procedural rules for homeowner association and condominium association board meetings and annual meetings of members. Some states have enacted laws that require a specific parliamentary authority for certain types of meetings. In all of these instances, lawyers with experience in parliamentary procedure could have been helpful in the discussion.

Beyond these current issues, think of all the contexts in which meeting procedures are essential and lawyers are regularly involved:

- Membership meetings of for-profit corporations and nonprofit associations
- Governmental meetings—school boards, city councils, and county commissions
- Legislative bodies
- Churches and synagogues
- Community associations, including homeowner, condominium, and townhouse associations

Unfortunately, despite the expectation by some people that lawyers know about parliamentary law, few lawyers focus on meeting-procedure issues.

As a result of all of these concerns, a new organization—the American College of Parliamentary Lawyers (ACPL)—has been created. Organized as a Massachusetts nonprofit corporation, the College is also working towards tax-exempt 501(c)(6) recognition. The purpose of the College, as stated in the bylaws, is as follows:

- a) to acknowledge attorneys who have distinguished themselves through contributions to the practice of parliamentary law and who have committed themselves to high standards of professional and ethical conduct;
- b) to provide a forum for the exchange of information among experienced legal professionals for the purpose of the advancement of parliamentary law;
- c) to provide educational opportunities for College members and non-members to discuss, advance, improve, learn about, and further the members' and the public's knowledge of parliamentary law;
- d) to facilitate the development of materials and programming concerning parliamentary law;
- e) to cooperate and consult with organizations, government agencies, and other groups having an interest in parliamentary law and practice;
- f) to advocate for democratic principles of self-governance in voluntary organizations through the use of parliamentary law and procedure; and
- g) to engage in such other activities as may be necessary to carry out the purpose of the College.

To be eligible for membership in the College, an individual must be a lawyer admitted to practice law before the highest court of a state, province, or territory of the United States or Canada, or the highest court of any other nation. If retired, the individual must have retired from the practice of law in good standing and been admitted to practice law before the highest court of a state, province, or territory of the United States or Canada, or the highest court of any other nation. Finally, the individual must support the purpose of the College.

From the parliamentary side, lawyers must show both procedural knowledge and activity before admission to the College. To be eligible for membership, an attorney must have attained the designation of Registered Parliamentarian (RP) or Professional Registered Parliamentarian (PRP) from the National Association of Parliamentarians or Certified Parliamentarian (CP) or Certified Professional Parliamentarian (CPP) from the American Institute of Parliamentarians. In addition, the attorney must show proof of significant service and contribution to the practice of parliamentary law through teaching and lecturing; authorship of books, articles, program materials or other scholarly publications; and/or substantial participation in or leadership of professional or industry organizations and committees concerned with the practice or application of parliamentary law.

The inaugural meeting of the College was held on Sunday, September 30, 2007, in Omaha during the NAP Convention. At that time, twenty members were inducted into the College. NAP President Jeanette Williams, AIP President Mary Smith, and AIP Immediate Past President Mark Schilansky were all present and made welcoming remarks. In addition, the following officers were elected: President Jim Slaughter, PRP, CPP-T; Vice President Burke Balch, PRP; Secretary Carl Silverman, PRP; and Treasurer Michael Malamut, PRP, CPP-T.

Admission to the College is fairly straightforward. Any attorney meeting the eligibility requirements can be proposed by two sponsoring members of the College. Once credentials have been verified, voting upon the admission may take place at the same or any following meeting of the board. A two-thirds vote of board members present can elect to membership, and anyone elected becomes a member upon payment of annual dues.

Without question, the ACPL is not intended as a competitor to either AIP or NAP, but as a complement to those organizations. After all, members of the College must already be members and credentialed by one of those two parliamentary organizations. The primary purpose of the ACPL will be to provide an opportunity for attorneys who have knowledge of parliamentary procedure to be engaged in various parliamentary issues around the country. For instance, it is hoped that ACPL can facilitate comments to drafts of the Model Nonprofit Act and then coordinate input from members as states consider adopting the Act. The College has established an e-mail group discussion list so that members can exchange ideas. As the College

matures, the goal is that both of the two major parliamentary organizations will work with the College on programming for presentations of a legal nature.

A number of non-lawyers have asked about membership in the College. The College bylaws actually allow the board to permit individuals who do not qualify for membership but who support the purposes of the College to receive such benefits as determined by the board (but with no rights of membership). Until such time as the College is better organized and has more members, however, membership has been limited to active and retired attorneys.

If you or someone you know is an attorney and might meet the ACPL eligibility requirements, please let us know. We are happy to contact them directly about ACPL membership. We also hope that the creation of the College may encourage attorneys who do not yet have NAP or AIP designations to become more active and to pursue such credentials. Such a result would be positive for NAP and AIP as well as the many organizations that lawyers serve.

For more information on the College, visit www.parliamentarylawyers.org.

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