



*Houses of Parliament
Jamaica*

*Handbook
for
Parliamentarians*

January 2012

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Preface

The purpose of this handbook is to provide Parliamentarians with basic information about the Parliament as well as their privileges and obligations, and the benefits and services that are afforded them during their tenure.

While the information contained in the publication is not exhaustive it is hoped that it will serve as a quick reference and guide to other sources of information.



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1. **Composition of Parliament**

Under the Jamaican Constitution the Parliament of Jamaica consists of Her Majesty The Queen, the Senate and the House of Representatives. Her Majesty's representative in Jamaica is the Governor-General.

The Senate consists of twenty-one Senators, thirteen of whom are appointed by the Governor-General on the advice of the Prime Minister and eight on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition. The House of Representatives consists of sixty-three elected Members who are known as Members of Parliament.

2. **Presiding Officers**

At the first meeting of a newly-appointed Senate and a newly-elected House of Representatives or when there is a vacancy, Members appoint a Presiding Officer. The Presiding Officer in the Senate is known as the ***President of the Senate*** and in the House of Representatives the Presiding Officer is known as the ***Speaker of the House***. The role of the Presiding Officer is to ensure that Members keep within the rules of their respective Houses as contained in the *Standing Orders*, as well as those in keeping with standard Parliamentary practice and precedent.

3. Leader of Government Business

The Leader of Government Business in the Senate and the Leader of the House are responsible for arranging the business of the Senate and the House of Representatives, respectively. It is their duty to ensure that the business of their respective Houses is conducted in a timely manner. In so doing, the Leader consults with the Leader of Opposition Business and seeks to reach an agreement as to what business will be done on a particular day.

4. Mace

The Mace is the symbol of Royal authority and the Parliament is not properly constituted without the presence of the Mace on the Table. There are two Maces, one for the Senate and the other for the House of Representatives. At the start of each day's sitting the Presiding Officer is preceded by the Marshal bearing the Mace and the Mace is placed on the *Table of the House*. When the House resolves into a Committee of the Whole and the Presiding Officer functions as Chairman, the Mace is placed under the Table.

5. Time and Duration of Sittings of the Senate and House of Representatives

The *Standing Orders* of the Senate provides for the Senate to meet on Fridays or on such other day as the President may determine. The meetings of the Senate commence at 10:00 a.m.

The *Standing Orders* of the House of Representatives provides for the House to meet on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays at 2:00 p.m.

6. Quorum

The quorum of the Senate and of a Committee of the whole Senate is eight besides the person presiding. The quorum of the House of Representatives and of a Committee of the whole House is sixteen Members besides the person presiding.

7. Ceremonial Opening of Parliament

The commencement of the legislative year is marked by the Ceremonial Opening of Parliament when the Governor-General delivers the *Throne Speech*. The *Throne Speech* embodies the legislative agenda for the ensuing year.

8. Budget

Each year, immediately following the *Throne Speech*, the *Estimates of Expenditure* is tabled and referred to the Standing Finance Committee which consists of all the Members of the House of Representatives. The *Appropriation Bill* is then presented to the Parliament to provide for the expenditure of the Government of Jamaica for the financial year.

8.1 Budget Debate

Once the report of the Standing Finance Committee on the *Estimates of Expenditure* is approved, the Minister of Finance opens the debate on the *Appropriation Bill*, which is referred to as the *Budget Debate*. In the *Budget Debate*, the Minister of Finance outlines the various programmes and policies of the Government and the means by which they will be financed.

By convention, other speakers include:

- The Prime Minister
- The Leader of the Opposition
- The Opposition Spokesperson on Finance
- At least one Minister speaking on matters under his portfolio
- At least one other Opposition Spokesperson

8.2 *Sectoral Debate*

The Sectoral Debate is based on a Government motion or motions seeking the approval of the House for proposed programmes and projects within the different sectors. All Members of Parliament who did not contribute to the *Budget Debate* may participate in this debate.

8.3 *State of the Nation Debate*

The State of the Nation Debate is based on a motion brought by a Government Senator thanking the Governor-General for the *Throne Speech* and seeking the approval of the Senate for the Government's plans and programmes within the different sectors. All Senators may contribute to the *State of the Nation Debate*.

9. **Prorogation and Dissolution of Parliament**

A Parliamentary term is divided into sessions by legislative year. ***Prorogation*** signals the end of a session of Parliament. The life or term of Parliament is five years but it may be terminated earlier if a general election is called. ***Dissolution*** signals the end of the parliamentary term. When the Parliament is dissolved all matters before it are terminated and

all Members vacate their seats; however, Cabinet Ministers continue to carry out their functions until a new Cabinet is named.

10. Constitutional, Statutory and Regulatory Provisions

The main constitutional, statutory and regulatory provisions of which Members should be aware are as follows:

- The Constitution of Jamaica
- Parliament (Integrity of Members) Act
- Senate and House of Representatives (Powers and Privileges) Act
- Attestation of Instruments (Facilities) Act
- Retiring Allowances (Legislative Service) Act
- Parliament (Members' Questions) Act
- Standing Orders of the House of Representatives of Jamaica
- Standing Orders of the Senate of Jamaica

11. Parliamentary Protocol

Parliamentary protocol requires that Members observe certain rules, among which, are the following:

- Members shall be present in the House a few minutes before the scheduled time of commencement of a sitting.
- Members shall cease all conversation and rise in their places when the Marshal announces the arrival of the Presiding Officer. Members who are not in the Chamber on the arrival of the Presiding Officer shall stand silently in the corridors until after Prayers, after which they shall quickly and quietly take their seats. Likewise, at the adjournment of the sitting, Members shall rise in their places and remain silent until the Presiding Officer has left the Chamber.
- Members shall bow to the Presiding Officer on entering and leaving the Chamber.
- Members shall at all times address the Presiding Officer or, in Committee, the Chairman.
- Members shall not sit or stand with their backs towards the Presiding Officer.

- Members shall not leave the Chamber when the Presiding Officer is addressing the House.
- Members shall stand in their usual seat while addressing the House; otherwise, the leave of the Presiding Officer shall be sought.
- Members shall not pass between the Presiding Officer and another Member who is speaking.
- Members shall enter and leave the Chamber unobtrusively while the House is in session.
- Members present in the Chamber during a debate shall maintain silence while another Member is speaking, and shall not interrupt except in accordance with the provisions of the *Standing Orders* of their respective House.
- Members shall not leave the Chamber immediately after delivering a speech; courtesy to the House requires that on concluding their speeches members shall resume their seat to listen to the contribution of others and leave the Chamber only afterwards, if necessary.

- Members shall not stand in the aisles or other areas of the Chamber. They shall either remain seated or leave the Chamber.
- Members shall not disrupt the proceedings in the Chamber by talking or laughing loudly in the Lobby or corridors.
- Members shall not recognize individuals in the visitors' gallery.
- Members shall not read any publication or correspondence except in connection with the business of the House.
- Members shall not use laptop computers or other devices serving similar functions during the proceedings of the House or in Committee except for the purpose of taking notes or consulting reference materials. Where required, such devices shall only be used in silent mode and in a manner in keeping with the dignity and decorum of the House.
- Members shall not use mobile telephones or other devices serving similar functions during proceedings of the House or in Committee, neither should these be visibly displayed on their person.

- Members shall not distribute, or allow partisan literature to be distributed, within the precincts of the House.
- Members shall not shout party slogans in the House.
- Members shall not wear or display partisan paraphernalia of any kind within the precincts of the House.
- Members shall not smoke within the precincts of the House.
- Members shall not eat or drink in the Chamber while the House is in session. An exception is made when a Member is making a contribution to a Debate or when a Committee is in session and beverages are offered.

12. Absence from Sittings

Members are required to inform the Presiding Officer of their absence in order to satisfy provisions of the Constitution embodied in the *Standing Orders*. Such notification should be given in advance of the sitting *in writing*. In the case of the Senate, the letter should be addressed to the Clerk to the

Houses. In the case of the House of Representatives, the letter should be addressed to the Speaker and delivered through the Clerk's office.

13. Salary and Emoluments

Salary and emoluments are paid on a monthly basis. All Members of Parliament, Senate Ministers, Ministers of State and Parliamentary Secretaries are asked to provide the Accounts section with the relevant information as set out in the letter issued to new and returning Members.

Senators receive a stipend for attendance at meetings of the Senate and Committees, while Committee Chairmen who are not Ministers, receive an allowance for attendance at Committee meetings.

14. Constituency Allowance

All Members of Parliament are entitled to a constituency allowance to defray the cost of office rental, utilities and office supplies and stationery, including letterheads.

15. Members' Constituency Staff

All Members of Parliament may engage the services of a Constituency Secretary and a Chauffeur, to be paid by the Houses of Parliament. Members may make recommendations to the Clerk to the Houses for suitably qualified persons to fill the positions.

16. Benefits

16.1 Duty Concession on Motor Vehicle

All Members may avail themselves of the 20% duty concession on motor vehicles available through the Ministry of Finance. Each Member is entitled to the concession once in every Parliamentary term. Among the conditions which apply is that the vehicle may not be sold or otherwise disposed of within a three year period; otherwise the duty has to be repaid.

To access the concession, Members are asked to submit a letter of request to the Clerk to the Houses together with the original *pro forma* invoice from the prospective dealer, a copy of their driver's licence and the completed concession form (available from the Ministry of Finance's website at www.mof.gov.jm), which will be submitted to the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry will then forward the letter granting the

duty concession to the Commissioner of Customs with a copy sent to the Member.

16.2 *Health Insurance*

All Members of Parliament, the President of the Senate and Senate Ministers, Ministers of State and Parliamentary Secretaries are entitled to health benefits (currently provided by Sagicor), which cover the Member, spouse and children under 18 years of age. Where a child is over the age of 18, but is pursuing tertiary education, the benefit may be extended to that child upon submission of proof of studies. This information is to be submitted to the Director, Human Resources and Administration.

16.3 *Pension*

All Members of Parliament contribute to the National Insurance Scheme and a Government pension scheme. The *Retiring Allowances (Legislative Service) Act*, makes provision for legislators (within the meaning of the Act) to receive a pension for service over two Parliamentary terms or a minimum of nine years. Where a Member does not serve the minimum period to become eligible for a pension, the contribution made during the period of service is refundable, upon application.

Members who are retiring may contact the Office of the Clerk regarding the payment of a pension or the refund of pension contributions, as the case may be.

17. The Office of the Clerk

17.1 The Clerk to the Houses

The officer responsible for the administration of the Parliament is the Clerk to the Houses. The Clerk is assisted by a Deputy Clerk and an Assistant Clerk. These officers also carry out procedural functions, and are known as *Clerks-at-the-Table* or *Table Officers*. The Clerks attend all meetings of the Senate and House, and they are responsible for advising the Presiding Officers and Members on parliamentary procedure, as well as carrying out the administrative aspects of the Parliament's work both within and outside the Chamber. The latter includes responsibility for the printing and circulation of Bills, the preparation of Minutes of Proceedings of the Senate and House, the laying of documents, the preparation of the Order Paper, the production of the official report of parliamentary proceedings (*Hansard*) and liaison with Ministries and departments.

The Houses of Parliament, as a department of the State, is involved in a number of public sector initiatives which the

Clerk to the Houses oversees. The Clerk also has responsibility for inter-Parliamentary liaison and the Houses of Parliament's participation in the activities of international organizations.

17.2 The Legislative Counsel

The Legislative Counsel provides advice to the Clerk and Members on the purpose, structure and implication of legislation and petitions to ensure that they are consistent with the Constitution and existing statutes.

The Legislative Counsel also provides advice to Members on the preparation of Private Members' Bills and Motions and, where required, assists promoters and their legal representatives in the preparation and presentation of Private Bills. The Legislative Counsel also monitors the bringing into force of Acts which have received the Assent, and the promulgation of regulations.

17.3 The Marshal to the Houses

The Marshal to the Houses is responsible for assisting the Presiding Officer in enforcing the rules of order in the Senate and House and the precincts of the Parliament, permitting access to the galleries, conducting tours of the Parliament in collaboration with the Public Relations Officer, and carrying

out ceremonial functions, such as attending on the President and Speaker for each day's meeting and for ceremonial events.

The Marshal has the authority to remove disorderly visitors from the Gallery and, on the instruction of the Presiding Officer, disorderly Members from the Chamber. He has oversight of a team of Orderlies who are assigned to work in the Chamber to lay documents, assist in relaying information, copy official documents and assist Members wherever possible, among other tasks assigned to them outside the Chamber.

The Marshal is responsible for security and emergency management of the Parliamentary estate and adjunct offices, namely the Office of the Leader of the Opposition and the Office of the Political Ombudsman.

17.3.1 Security

As part of the security arrangements which are in place for the safety of Members, only members of the security forces are allowed to carry firearms while in the building. Members are asked to leave firearms and ammunition at the Police Post immediately on arrival. The Police will enter the relevant information in a log book, and return the firearms and ammunition on the Members' departure.

For the safety of Members, all visitors to the Parliament will be denied entry to the areas designated “**Members Only**”, namely the Chamber Lobby, the Conference Rooms and the Members’ Lounge. Guests of Members will therefore only be permitted entry to those areas if they are accompanied by the Member who has invited them there.

Security personnel and drivers may accompany the Member to whom they are assigned to any area of the Parliament at the Member’s behest; however, when dining alone, those persons are required to use the Staff Dining Room.

17.3.2 Emergency Management Plan

The Parliament’s emergency management plan includes an evacuation plan, and from time to time drills will be carried out. All Members are asked to cooperate with the procedures and instructions, and to participate in these exercises.

17.4 Human Resource & Administration

Human Resource & Administration oversees the well-being and development of Members and their Parliamentary staff. This section is also responsible for recruitment, records management and employee relations.

17.5 *Accounts*

The Accounts section is responsible for payment of salaries to Members and their staff. Queries on all accounting matters may be directed to the Accountant.

17.6 *Hansard*

The *Hansard* is the official record of Parliament. Verbatim notes of all Parliamentary debates and meetings of Parliamentary committees are taken by Stenotype Writers. These are later printed and bound in volumes according to the Parliamentary Session in which the proceedings took place, and laid on the Table of both Houses.

Members who wish to review the notes of a particular meeting may request them from the Chief Stenotype Writer. While corrections may be made to typographical errors, no substantive changes may be made to the text, as the record is to faithfully reproduce what the person speaking actually said.

17.7 Library

The Parliamentary Library is available for the use of Members and the public. Material includes all records of parliamentary proceedings, namely *Hansard* and Minutes of Proceedings, documents tabled in both Houses, Laws of Jamaica and Subsidiary Legislation, documentation relating to global parliamentary activities, journals, newsletters and other publications from a number of regional and international organizations, as well as information on a wide variety of subjects.

The Librarian periodically publishes a list of new material available in the library, which is placed on the Parliament's website and the Notice Board in the Chamber Lobby. Efforts are also made to secure documents from other libraries on behalf of Members, but adequate notice is required for this type of service.

Members are encouraged to take advantage of the library services for research and information.

17.8 Research Assistance

The Houses of Parliament in collaboration with the University of the West Indies Centre for Leadership and Governance has an ongoing programme to provide research assistance.

Members who require assistance with research should make their request to the Clerk in writing.

17.9 Information and Communication Technology

This section is responsible for overseeing the information and communication technology needs of the Parliament.

17.9.1 Website

The Parliament's website provides information on current Parliamentary activities such as the Tabling of Bills, Reports and Minutes of Proceedings. Copies of the *Standing Orders* of the Senate and the House of Representatives and information on Members, made available from the *Biographical Data Form*, can also be accessed on the website.

Currently, the Parliament is in the process of digitizing its archived records. These records will be made available on the Parliament's website as soon as the process is complete.

The website may be accessed at www.japarliament.gov.jm.

17.9.2 Computer and Internet Access

A computer workstation with Internet access has been installed in both Conference Rooms for the use of Members.

Wireless Internet access is also available in the Conference Rooms.

Members are encouraged to check their e-mail on a regular basis for correspondence from the various administrative sections.

17.9.3 Telephone

Telephone service is provided in each Conference Room for the use of all Members. Calls are not charged to Members; however, in an effort to conserve on telephone charges, Members are asked to limit calls to matters of an official nature.

17.10 Public Relations

The Public Relations Unit is responsible for maintaining a positive image of the Parliament as a whole, Parliamentary Committees and individual Members in the conduct of their Parliamentary duties. This is done through public education, internal communications and liaising with the media.

18. Members' Lounge and Food Services

Members are invited to avail themselves of the facilities of the Members' Lounge. Lunch is available daily and evening meals are also available when the House meets. Members may pay for their food and beverages on consumption or they may sign the vouchers on each occasion. Where the Member signs a voucher, the payments are deducted from his salary. Members who invite their staff or visitors to dine should make prior arrangements with the Food & Beverage Manager for settlement of the bill.

19. Parking

Parking is available at Gordon House and the Jamaica Manufacturers' Association (JMA) north parking lot assigned to the Houses of Parliament (entrance on Charles Street). When the House meets and access by the public is restricted, parking is allowed on the street in front of Gordon House.

20. Official Motor Vehicle Plate

Each Member is assigned an official motor vehicle plate. The purpose of the plate is to facilitate access to the Houses of Parliament, and it is therefore intended for the use of Members or their assigned Chauffeurs only. The plate does not provide a guarantee against prosecution for breaches of the *Road Traffic Act*.

Members are responsible for the care and safekeeping of the plate and will be liable for any loss. The plate is the property of the Houses of Parliament and is to be returned to the Office of the Clerk at the end of the Member's tenure.

Contact Information

Houses of Parliament
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Kingston, Jamaica
Tel.: (876) 922-0200 **Fax:** (876) 967-1708
Website: <http://www.japarliament.gov.jm>
Email: clerk@japarliament.gov.jm

Office	Extension
Clerk to the Houses	253
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