



The Florida Senate

Interim Project Report 98-45

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Committee on Rules and Calendar

Senator W.G. "Bill" Bankhead, Chairman

REVIEW OF THE SENATE PAGE PROGRAM

SUMMARY

The purpose of this interim project is to determine how the Senate Page Program can be more beneficial to the participating Pages as well as how the program can be operated more effectively and efficiently. Program enhancements considered in this report are summarized below:

- In order to provide better continuity of the Program and better supervision of the Pages, the Page Program should be implemented by one Senate entity, or a clear line of supervisory responsibility should be established in written policy so that when concerns arise they can be properly handled.
- Pages should be allowed a choice of being paid minimum wage or receiving hours of credit toward community service (which are required to be eligible for certain school scholarships).
- The age requirement for participation in the Page Program should be lowered from 16 to 15 years of age to allow for greater participation.
- The maximum number of Pages serving per week should be increased to 18. Exceptions should be made during the weeks of spring break in which case the maximum should be no more than 20.
- Students residing in Tallahassee who wish to serve as an alternate Page but do not have a Senate sponsor should be used on an "as needed" basis. First priority would be given to alternates who have a Senate sponsor.
- Additional activities should be provided for the Pages, time permitting, so that their Tallahassee visit is a well-rounded experience.
- Pages should be provided with the opportunity to work in a committee for a limited amount of time.
- The dress code required for Pages should be revised to be more specific.

- The Senate should provide Pages with an opportunity to purchase a specially designed Senate Page T-shirt as an additional keepsake to commemorate their service in the Senate.
- An informational handbook should be compiled detailing the duties and responsibilities of the Senate Pages.

BACKGROUND

The Florida Senate Page Program, which was created more than 25 years ago, is administered by the Senate Rules and Calendar Committee. The program provides students interested in Florida State Government with an opportunity to learn about the legislative process and to interact with their elected officials. This educational program allows students to witness firsthand how an idea becomes a law. The Rules Committee is responsible for oversight of the program and, in particular, for the processing of Page applications and scheduling. The Sergeant's Office supervises the Pages during working hours, maintains and approves their payroll, and presents a "certificate of completion" along with a group photograph to each Page who has successfully completed a week of service. A Page Supervisor, who is under the direction of the Sergeant's Office, is responsible for ensuring that the Pages complete their assigned duties and that they display appropriate behavior during working hours. Supervision of the Pages does not extend beyond the hours they work in the Senate.

Participants in the Page Program are between the ages of 16 and 18 and are usually sponsored by a Senator from their area. Senators may sponsor up to four Pages during each regular session. On average, approximately 15 students serve per week. Slightly more students serve during the more hectic weeks near the end of session and during school spring break.

The Rules & Calendar Committee processes applications submitted by Senators and schedules a

week for the Pages to serve. Scheduling is usually determined by the Page's first, second, and third choices as indicated on their application form. Every effort is made to assign Pages their first choice; however, there is no guarantee since placement is made on a first-come-first-served basis. Page duties include the delivery of materials in the Capitol Complex to Senators, committees and other Senate staff, as well as working inside the chamber distributing materials or running errands as assigned to them by Senators and the Secretary of the Senate.

Pages are paid the federally established minimum wage based on hours served. When the Senate is not meeting in Session, Pages are given the opportunity to participate in mock legislative sessions and to take part in other related activities as taking tours of the Old Capitol, the Supreme Court Building, the House of Representatives, and the Museum of Florida History in the R.A. Gray Building.

METHODOLOGY

In preparing this report, Rules Committee staff met with the Senate Sergeant at Arm's Office as well as the Page Coordinator in the House of Representatives. Information was gathered from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), and the Legislative Service's Fiscal Office. Information was also obtained from conversations during session with the current Senate Page Supervisor, parents of the Pages, and school personnel.

FINDINGS

During the past session, some of the concerns which surfaced in the Page Program were due to slight deviations from the guidelines, such as using younger participants than usual in the program. This appears to be due to the lack of a well established chain of command for ensuring compliance with the Senate's Page policies. Since the Senate Rules Committee, the Senate Sergeant at Arm's Office and the Senate Page Supervisor all have some responsibility for implementing portions of the program, communications and supervisory control can be rather confusing at times to both the Pages and the Page Supervisor.

One option for correcting this situation would be to establish clear lines of supervisory responsibility so that the Page Supervisor and others would know who is in charge of the program. If any problems arose,

there would be no doubt as to who could resolve them. That person would be the Chairman of the Senate Rules and Calendar Committee. Another option would be to have only one entity responsible for the supervision and continuity of the entire program. This would eliminate any confusion as to the chain of command and should create a more efficient program. According to the Sergeant's Office, if that office accepted responsibility of the entire program, the additional responsibilities could be assumed by existing staff. The drawback to this approach is that legislative staff would then be responsible for ensuring member compliance with Senate policy. This can place staff in a difficult situation.

On the other hand, if the Rules Committee became solely responsible for the program, the Rules chairman could mediate any problem and provide a resolution. However, additional part-time staffing for the Rules Committee would probably be required during session to handle the additional responsibility. This is not due to the degree of difficulty in dealing directly with the Pages or completing the clerical work involved with the program. The necessity for additional help would primarily be due to the other responsibilities the Rules Committee staff must handle during the crunch of the legislative session.

Regardless of which option is selected, a written policy should be developed so that all parties involved in the process, especially the Page Supervisor, will know to whom problems and other issues requiring immediate attention should be directed.

Utilizing information obtained from the National Conference of State Legislatures, Florida's Senate Page Program was compared to other states who offer similar programs. Of the 42 states who have similar programs, 19 listed primary authority of the program as the Secretary of the Senate while 16 states listed the Sergeant at Arm's Office. Only eight states (including Florida), listed another entity responsible for implementation of the program.

Participation by students in the Page Program has declined over the past two years. Students are finding it more difficult to be excused from one full week of school. It was revealed through discussions with students and parents that this is due, in part, to the increased demands of academics and other extra-curricular activities. Also, in order for students to be eligible for certain college scholarships, they must now complete a required number of community service hours by the time of graduation.

Another factor affecting the availability of student Pages is school spring break. The majority of students who participate in the Page Program prefer to serve during the week of their spring break so they will not miss any school or have to make up homework. Therefore, the number of requests to serve during spring break is always higher than for other times. To accommodate this situation, and since there is an increasing need, the number of Pages serving during the school spring break weeks should be increased to 20.

While participation is down, the need for Senate Pages appears to be going up. In the past, additional Pages were needed only during the hectic closing weeks of session. Recently, however, that trend has shifted and it appears that more Pages are now needed for the weeks during which the Senate considers the new budget. The relocation of Senate committees to a new building will also increase the demand for Senate Pages. Based on these factors, it appears appropriate to increase the number of Pages who serve during any given week from 15 to 18, except for spring break.

To help fulfill the increased need for Pages, several changes could be implemented. The Senate could provide students the option of being paid minimum wage for their hours of service or using their hours toward a community service requirement. This would make the program more attractive to students who wish to pursue college scholarships. Each student would need to consult with his or her individual school to see if serving as a Page would qualify as community service for the particular scholarship in question.

Consideration should also be given to lowering the age requirement of Pages from 16 to 15 years of age. This would provide a larger pool of potential participants that are still mature enough to enjoy the Senate Page experience.

Sometimes it is necessary for alternates to fill in at the last minute due to a cancellation. First priority should be given to alternates who have a Senate sponsor, then to alternates who have not obtained a sponsor but have contacted the Rules Committee requesting to be an alternate on an "as needed" basis. Those alternates would be selected in order of the date their applications were received. It has been observed that the majority of these vacancies are most frequently (but not necessarily) filled by Tallahassee or other surrounding area participants due to the fact that they are more able to report for work with only a few days'

notice. This availability has proven to be very beneficial to the Page Program.

Providing Pages with a well-rounded educational experience is the main objective of the Page Program. When the Senate is not in session and committees are not meeting, the Page Supervisor encourages students to participate in mock sessions in the chamber. They are also provided an opportunity to tour the Old Capitol, the Supreme Court Building and be photographed with the Senate President. Over the years, an increasing number of Pages have expressed interest in touring nearby college and university campuses such as Tallahassee Community College, Florida State University, and Florida A & M University. However, finding transportation has been a major problem. If the Senate could furnish sufficient transportation, and if written parental permission were provided, these sites of interest to the Pages could be visited. Such trips could be arranged depending on availability of the Pages and only if the Senate is not in session. If transportation were available, another option might be for the participants to tour the Governor's Mansion.

When the demands of session are low, another possible legislative activity in which to involve the Pages is the committee process. Pages could work in a committee for a brief period so that they may observe the steps involved in preparing a bill to be heard in committee. This would not only be educational for the Pages but it would hopefully assist committees in meeting their deadlines.

According to the Page Supervisor, one of the highlights of a Page's visit to the Senate is the opportunity to meet the Page's sponsoring Senator. Many times, however, this opportunity has been lost due to scheduling conflicts or demands of the session. An experience so important to a young Page should not be overlooked. It may be best to remind, and encourage, members to provide an opportunity to meet with his or her Page so that they can understand, firsthand, what it means to be a Florida Senator. In addition, the Page Coordinator could arrange time once a week for a Senator or other individual involved with state government to speak to the Pages in an informal atmosphere, perhaps while snacking on pizza or other refreshments. This would provide Pages with an educational opportunity to ask questions about the legislative process or state government and at the same time get to know their elected officials.

Recently there has been discussion among Senate members and staff as to the enforcement of the dress code required for Pages, especially female Pages. Although the current dress code states that absolutely “no micro-mini skirts will be accepted,” there has still been confusion as to what length constitutes a “micro-mini skirt.” Therefore, a clarification of the dress code requirement stating what clothing is or is not appropriate needs to be incorporated into the existing guidelines. Language could be added to the existing guidelines to resolve the length of a skirt or dress to read as follows:

“Dresses and skirts must extend at least three inches beyond the individual’s fingertips when arms are extended at the sides.”

Pages also need to be informed not only in writing, but verbally, that if they do not comply with the dress code set forth they will immediately be sent home to change clothes.

As part of this review, a change in the dress of the Pages was considered for two reasons: first, to address compliance with the dress code; second, to more readily distinguish Pages from the Sergeant’s staff considering the similar attire of the two. One option discussed was to have the Pages purchase at least two or three colored, collared shirts from the Senate to wear during their week of service with coordinating khaki colored slacks (with khaki colored skirts for the females optional). Although ties would not be required for the males, a dark navy jacket would still be required for both male and female Pages while on duty in the chamber. With all Pages dressed identically, they would be easy to identify. After researching this idea, however, it became evident that cost would be a major factor and might prevent some Pages from participating.

Another option discussed was for Pages to purchase a colored blazer different from the blue blazers now required. The Sergeant’s Office has indicated that Pages are sometimes mistaken for employees of their staff. A different colored blazer would set the Pages apart so that there would be no confusion. The blazer could be coordinated with clothes that the Page already has in his or her wardrobe as long as it conforms to the current dress code. The Senate emblem could still be used on the front pocket of the blazer and the name badge could be made larger to include not only the name of the Page but also the Page’s sponsoring Senator. The emblem and identification badge could

be kept by the Pages as a memento. It appears that this option, if a change is pursued, would be the most cost effective for the Pages.

As an additional keepsake to commemorate the Pages’ service in the Senate, the Senate should consider offering participants the opportunity to purchase a specially designed Senate Page T-shirt at a nominal fee. These shirts could be distributed to the Pages at the end of each week of service. The House of Representatives has already implemented this practice in their Page Program and it has been well received by the Pages who have participated. Estimated cost for the shirt provided locally would be approximately \$7.00.

A Senate Page handbook outlining the entire Page Program, including general duties and responsibilities, could be assembled and distributed to the Pages with their Page application form. This handbook would be beneficial not only by providing a more detailed explanation to the Pages, but it would also educate the general public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommended changes to the Senate Page Program are listed below:

- In order to provide better continuity of the Program and better supervision of the Pages, the Page Program should be implemented by one Senate entity, or a clear line of supervisory responsibility should be established in written policy so that when concerns arise they can be properly handled.
- Allowing Pages the option of being paid minimum wage or receiving hours of credit toward community service might be helpful to the student and encourage more to participate.
- The age requirement for participation in the Page Program should be lowered from 16 to 15 years of age to allow for greater participation.
- The maximum number of Pages serving per week should be increased to 18. Exceptions should be made during the weeks of spring break in which case the maximum should be no more than 20.
- Students residing in Tallahassee who wish to serve as an alternate Page but do not have a Senate sponsor should be used on an “as needed” basis. First priority would be given to alternates who have a Senate sponsor.
- Additional activities should be provided for the Pages, time permitting, so that their Tallahassee visit is a well-rounded experience.
- Pages should be provided with the opportunity to work in a committee for a limited amount of time.
- The language of the dress code should be revised to be more specific.
- The Senate should provide Pages with an opportunity to purchase a specially designed T-shirt as an additional keepsake to commemorate their service in the Senate.
- An informational handbook should be compiled detailing the duties and responsibilities of Senate Pages. This could be distributed to the Pages as well as made available for the general public.

COMMITTEE(S) INVOLVED IN REPORT (*Contact first committee for more information.*)

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MEMBER OVERSIGHT

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