

# STATES OF JERSEY



## **STANDING ORDERS: ADDITIONAL SIGNATORIES ON PROPOSITIONS (P.174/2010) – FOURTH AMENDMENT**

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**Lodged au Greffe on 12th January 2011  
by Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier**

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**STATES GREFFE**

STANDING ORDERS: ADDITIONAL SIGNATORIES ON PROPOSITIONS  
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**PAGE 2 –**

Number the existing proposition as paragraph (a).

Insert new paragraph (b) –

“(b) to request the Privileges and Procedures Committee to bring forward an amendment to Standing Orders to require a proposition for debate lodged by the Chief Minister or another Minister to be endorsed and countersigned by all other 9 members of the Council of Ministers.”.

DEPUTY T.M. PITMAN OF ST. HELIER

## REPORT

Firstly, I must point out that given the written comments from PPC and the reported statements from the Chairman in the media – undoubtedly wholly correct in analysis – that the matter of finding 7 other politicians willing to countersign a proposition will not prove any barrier to the vast majority of ‘backbenchers’, I have to ask the question put to me by a member of the public, i.e. what are we doing wasting States time debating a proposition that will have little if any tangible consequence? Put in a nutshell, wasting States members’ time discussing a proposition about ... wasting States members’ time! Brilliant!

It must also be said that the reality that the raising of an important issue in the public interest should never be seen as wholly dependent upon the confidence of a vote winning outcome for a proposition is one that appears completely lost on the Senator.

Nevertheless, though I believe his original proposition will prove of little value, I would give credit and point out that, deeply inspired by Senator Routier’s underlying helpful intentions toward ‘backbenchers’ in putting forward his proposition, I now lodge this related amendment with a similarly helpful intention. This being to assist the Council of Ministers to ‘up their game’ from what must be acknowledged as an all too often spectacularly inept approach at joined-up political thinking these past 2 years.

Indeed, I believe acceptance of my amendment cannot fail to bring about a significant improvement in the Chief Minister and his team’s ability to produce policy that is consistent and politically coherent, by ensuring that propositions would need to be fully discussed and thought through by all before being lodged. Equally important, acceptance of my amendment can clearly also only bring about an enhanced recognition of collective responsibility and accountability that has regularly been conspicuous by its absence under this Council of Ministers. Anyone doubting the truth of this last observation need only consider the embarrassing fiasco of the Executive’s behaviour with regard to the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture’s attempts to bring forward Ministerial policy on reducing the subsidy to fee-paying schools.

Here we saw a well-intentioned Minister rapidly abandoned – effectively hung out to dry – by backtracking colleagues suddenly fearful of losing votes at the 2011 elections when some parents reacted angrily to policy until then stated as being supported by the Executive. Such a display of a muddled approach to policy-making, never mind political cowardice, could not have happened, and the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture not have been singled out for such personal vilification, had each of his Ministerial colleagues already had to sign up in black and white in support of policy that some now sought to distance themselves from.

There have been many other recent examples of course, just a couple of the more glaring ones being the never-ending North of Town Master Plan (let’s make that ‘plans’) and the shameful, drawn-out saga of the process underlying the Historic Abuse Inquiry and the suspension of the former Chief of Police. Looking back just a little further still in Ministerial history, could the appalling disaster of the incinerator development and contract fiasco that cost taxpayers so many millions have happened, or been swept under the carpet so easily, if such a public collective Ministerial responsibility had been in place? The answer must surely be ‘no’.

The discipline of a full set of 10 Ministerial signatures being required on all propositions from the Executive could only help to make both policy and process more effective. From a personal perspective, I would also say that adoption of my amendment would also ensure the time of 'backbenchers' who have none of the costly support available to Ministers was not wasted researching, or making amendments to ill-considered proposals that are subsequently repeatedly delayed or even withdrawn.

To finally repeat the sentiment of Senator Routier, I very much hope that the helpful intention of this amendment will be acknowledged by the Council of Ministers by their unanimous support for it. After all, should such support not be forthcoming, it would be difficult not to conclude that the Senator's proposition was nothing more than an attempt to further restrict the role of backbenchers and concentrate the ability to shape policy in the hands of a few. Neither could bode well for the democratic process.

#### **Financial and manpower implications**

I do not believe that there are any financial or manpower implications resulting from this amendment. Indeed, quite to the contrary, adoption of this amendment would almost certainly lead to more effective policy-making and consequent financial savings.