

STATES OF JERSEY



RE-INSTATEMENT OF SENATORS

**Lodged au Greffe on 8th January 2025
by Deputy M.E. Millar of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity
Earliest date for debate: 4th February 2025**

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –

- (a) that the office of Senator, elected on an Island-wide basis, should sit alongside the offices of Connétable and Deputy in the States Assembly, and should be reinstated by removing one Deputy from each of the nine electoral constituencies and substituting nine Senators in their place; and
- (b) to request the Privileges and Procedures Committee to bring forward the necessary legislative amendments to give effect to this proposition in time for the General Election in 2026.

DEPUTY M.E. MILLAR OF ST. JOHN, ST. LAWRENCE AND TRINITY

REPORT

Public opinion

When I stood for election in 2022, I made a commitment that I would seek to ensure the return of Senators for the 2026 election. This proposition meets that commitment. The removal of the Senators was a highly unpopular decision across the three parishes I represent, and the issue continues to be raised with me on a regular basis. I am aware that a similar sentiment exists elsewhere in the Island. It therefore remains clear to me that a majority of the electorate wish to see the return of the Island-wide mandate at the next election.

I am aware that this matter has been considered previously by this current Assembly through propositions lodged by Deputy Gorst and Deputy Farnham and then by Deputy Scott. Those propositions were, however, not specific in their requests and sought only to agree the principle that Senators should be re-instated. They did not set out the detail as to how that would be achieved. This proposition, by contrast, sets out a very clear position – if it is adopted, the States Assembly would be constituted of 9 Senators, 28 Deputies and 12 Connétables.

Voter equity

I understand that, in many respects, the current electoral system is more equitable than its predecessor. That was achieved, however, by establishing more equally balanced constituencies for Deputies. In the process, however, the most equitable office that has ever existed in the history of electoral politics in Jersey – the Senator – was thrown away at the same time. As a result, many Islanders now feel less enfranchised and feel that their ability to shape the membership of the States Assembly, and by implication the Government, has been reduced.

It is unnecessary for us to be in this position. It is possible for Islanders to have the best of all worlds. We can retain the current (more equal) electoral districts for Deputies, retain the Connétables and re-instate the Senators. Under this arrangement, the voting system would maintain its existing level of equity. The overwhelming majority of Islanders would still have more votes for Deputy than under the previous system, we would all retain our vote for Connétable, and we would all have nine votes for Senators. This would create a balanced blend of representation at local, district and Island-wide level. It is a system that served Jersey well for 70 years, and it can do so again for many years in the future.

Promoting fairness

It has also not been lost on the public that, in some districts, it was possible to top the poll at the 2022 election with fewer than 1000 votes. In other districts, however, at least 1000 votes were required to come in the last elected position. Again, the office of Senator deals with such issues, given that all Islanders, regardless of whether they live in an urban or country parish, are voting for the same candidates in the same election.

Bringing back Senators will enhance the fairness of elections in Jersey and ensure that future Governments are more representative of the voters who have elected them to serve the Island.

An Islandwide perspective

I believe that the current Assembly has lacked the perspective and overview that comes from having members who are elected on behalf of the whole Island. We risk becoming too parochial, or district based, and taking our eye off the big strategic issues that we need to address.

Jersey is a globally recognised international finance centre – and our economy depends on the ongoing success of financial services and related industries. These are industries which are operating in an ever more competitive global environment. We also have a number of upcoming infrastructure and public realm projects that need to be developed in an Island-wide context. Equally, a joined-up and more efficient public service will require direction and leadership from those who are able to dedicate themselves full-time to the challenges Jersey will face in the second quarter of this century. I believe we would all benefit from having more members in this Assembly who are able to fully commit their time and minds to these major Island issues.

Similarly, with the apparent growth of party politics in Jersey – or at least the sustained effort by a number of parties to win the trust of the electorate – it is only natural that those parties will relish the opportunity of an Island-wide platform from which to put their policies to the voters. This proposition will give those parties the opportunity of winning up to 9 seats in the States through one election, and the chance to demonstrate that they have broad support from voters across the Island. Indeed, the lack of Island-wide debate on policy issues in 2022 was noted as a drawback of that election, given that the focus was inevitably narrowed towards the district and Parish level.

Timeframe

This is likely to be the last opportunity for Members to re-instate the office of Senator in time for the 2026 General Election. Should this proposition be adopted, it would give the Privileges and Procedures Committee ample time to bring forward the necessary legislative amendments.

Should Members indicate a desire to have time to discuss the matter with their parishioners prior to the debate, including through parish and public meetings, I would be content to move the date of the debate accordingly.

Financial and staffing implications

There are limited financial and staffing implications from this proposition as it is anticipated that the majority of costs could be accommodated within existing PPC and Law Drafting resources, though it is accepted that there may need to be some re-prioritisation of workflows. It is also important to note that this is a re-instatement of the role, therefore the drafting already exists for inclusion of the Senatorial role within the required documents – and that this would therefore significantly reduce the administrative time needed.

There would be no overall increase in the membership of the States therefore no financial impact relating directly to salary.

Staffing implications would include the work of the PPC and the LDO, along with the relevant Officer time for implementation of any standard administrative changes required, for example nomination forms and other required paperwork. It should also be noted that the re-establishment of the Senatorial position may also require the organisation of additional hustings (and election material) for that element of the elections. It would be unlikely that there would be any corresponding reduction elsewhere as the same constituencies would remain in place for election of Deputies.

It is considered that all actions can be completed within existing budgets and accordingly, no additional resources would be required in the event that this proposition is adopted.

Children's Rights Impact Assessment

A Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) has been prepared in relation to this proposition and is available to read on the States Assembly website.