





NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF BELIZE

INDUCTION HANDBOOK FOR NEW MEMBERS

2020 EDITION

About the author

This document was produced by the CPA Headquarters Secretariat in collaboration with the National Assembly of Belize.

Acknowledgements

The CPA extends its thanks to the National Assembly of Belize for their collaboration with the provision of all relevant information in this document. Thanks are also extended to the Parliament of Canada for their expertise and contributions to the development of this Handbook.

CONTENTS

INDUCTION	2
FINANCES	4
RESOURCES	7
WELFARE OF MEMBERS AND PARLIAMENTARY STAFF	8
CODE OF CONDUCT	9
PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURES	10
COMMITTEES	13
PARLIAMENTARY STAFF: THEIR ROLES AND THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY STAFF COMMITTEE	14
FURTHER RESOURCES	17

Dear Honourable Member,

Congratulations on your election as a Member of the House of Representatives of Belize. This Handbook will act as a bite-size initial guide and reference point to ensure your first days in the National Assembly are as smooth as possible.

This handbook opens with careful consideration to the welfare of Members and parliamentary staff, exploring the security management in Parliament as well as the various emergency procedures that Members must adhere to in order to ensure that they remain safe.

This handbook covers the administration of Parliament, so that newly elected Members are able to familiarise themselves with the relevant resources available to them and other logistical matters that may facilitate their transition into Parliament. This handbook also provides an introduction to the various parliamentary staff who are available for support. A section on finance has been incorporated into this Handbook so that the Members are made aware of, and can easily access, the relevant details pertaining to the allowances, pension, insurance etc. It concludes by outlining the most important things to consider on the topic of conduct and other parliamentary business.

We hope you find it a valuable resource.

Clerk of the National Assembly

INDUCTION

After every general election, the National Assembly staff provide new Members with a two-day workshop training.

The workshop typically takes place on two consecutive Saturdays and lasts two and a half hours, from 9:30am to 12pm. A number of presentations are delivered in order to facilitate new Members with the transition into their new role.

You can expect that the presentations will be on the following topics:

Group Life and Health Insurance

This presentation will be delivered by a representative from Sagicor Life Inc.

Pension and Gratuity

This presentation will be delivered by a representative from the Accountant General's Office, who will outline how pension and gratuity are calculated.

Prevention of Corruption Act

This presentation will be delivered by a representative from the Integrity Commission Office.

Rules and Procedures in the Standing Orders

This presentation will be delivered by the Clerk, who will go through the Order of Business, Election of a Speaker and a Deputy Speaker, Papers, Content of Questions and the process of how a Bill becomes an Act.

Speakers delivering the presentations have all been carefully selected based on their knowledge and expertise on the topics.

All new Members will be notified of the chosen date for the training and are strongly advised to attend.

In order to assist you in carrying out your legislative functions with dispatch and self-confidence, please also see the additional documents:

- 1. Belize Constitution;
- 2. Standing Orders of the House of Representatives;
- 3. Legislative Assembly (Powers and Privileges) No. 23 of 1962;
- 4. National Assembly Pensions Act, Chapter 8, Revised Edition 2011
- 5. Sagicor/Capital Life Insurance Coverage Plan and;
- 6. An Information Circular.

Please feel free to contact the National Assembly for any assistance you may require in furtherance of your legislative endeavour at:

Email: ClerkNA@bna.gov.bz Telephone: 822-2141/2142

Access and Restrictions

Induction tour

New Members are given a tour around the parliament building in order to familiarise them with the various offices and facilities available on-site. This mini tour will be the best way for Members to get to know the parliament building so you are encouraged to ask as many questions as possible. This will help you remember where you need to be and when.

Once in the precincts of the Assembly, Members essentially have access to any space in the building and are encouraged to make use of the space, unless of course it is already occupied. The Member's Room, Opposition Members' Room and Committee Room are the most popular spaces (both Member's Rooms are located on the second floor, while the Committee Room is located on the third floor).

Car park

Although there is not a specific car park allotted to the parliament building, on occasion you may find that some police officers are stationed outside of the building to help clear space for Members to park. For Government Members, your offices are in walking distance from the ministry parking lot.

Visitor access

External visitors have restricted access, which leaves them confined to the public galleries.

If they wish to enter the building they are encouraged to bring a form of identification with them as they can expect to be thoroughly screened before being granted access.



FINANCES

This section explains everything in relation to finances, including salaries, allowances and your pension.

Salary

Each Member of the House of Representatives (with the exception of the Minister or Minister of State) receives a basic salary of \$37,800 per annum and an expense allowance of \$6,823 per annum.

Deputy Speaker Allowance

The Deputy Speaker recieves an allowance of \$1,000 per month.

Subsistence allowance

If you are a Member that is made to leave your constituency and commute further for any business related to the House of Representatives in your private vehicle, it may be worth noting that you are entitled to claim mileage at BZ\$1.30 per mile. You will only be exempt from claiming this mileage in the case that you were assigned a government vehicle for your commute.

You are also entitled to claim a subsistence allowance of BZ\$30.00 per day or for part of a day for as long as you are away from your constituency on National Assembly duties. This is regardless of whether you are using a government vehicle or your own private vehicle.

Transportation allowance

In the case that you are using your private vehicle to carry out your function as a Member of the House of Representatives you are entitled to a transportation allowance of BZ\$350.00 per month.

Telephone

As a Member, you receive a telephone allowance of BZ\$50.00 or BZ\$100.00 per month depending on your district of residence, (which works out to either BZ\$600 or BZ\$1, 200 per annum). Please speak to the Clerk about what amount you qualify for.

Other Allowances

The following allowances funded by the Ministry of Finance may not be applicable to all, but have been included for your information and ease of

reference: Community vote allowance of BZ\$4,000 per month, office operation allowance of BZ\$2,300 per month, Chairman of committee allowance of BZ\$1,000 per month.

Insurance

The National Assembly has a contract with Sagicor Capital Life Insurance Co. Ltd. to provide group insurance for all Members who qualify and meet enrolment requirements. The scheme covers Life, Critical Illness, Accidental Death, Dismemberment, Health: Medical, Dental and Vision.

Major Medical benefit coverage for Members under the age 65 is a maximum of BZ\$1,000,000.00 and for those between the ages of 65 and 70 years old, the maximum is BZ\$350,000.00. In both instances, the co-insurance payment is 80%.



If Members with dependents wish to cover their dependents, a monthly dependent premium of \$698.14 is to be paid by each Member. If you are opting to pay dependent coverage premium, you must complete the dependent section of the enrolment form which will be made available in the New Member's package by the Clerk's office.

National Assembly Pension

The National Assembly Pension Act, 1989, provides for a contributory pension scheme for persons who have served as legislators. As Members, you are entitled to this pension. For more



information on the scheme, please read the enclosed copy of the Act.

Constituency matters

If you have any enquiries on financial matters relating to your constituency, you are advised to contact the Ministry of Finance who are best placed to address your questions.

Additional Financial Considerations

In the case that a Member resigns or dies, a bi-election will take place as a seat cannot remain vacant for more than 90 days.

In the case that a Member dies during first term of parliament it will be treated as if they have completed the term and in turn, the family gets full gratuity (including with interest). In the case that a Member dies during the second term, their family will be given his or her retirement benefit.

In the case that a Member resigns in the first term, if they wish, they can claim for a refund of contribution.

If a Member serves for more than two terms, or atleast 8 years in the National Assembly, the Member qualifies for a pension/gratuity when he/she reaches retirement age.

Register of Interests

The Integrity Commission has asserted that Members must declare their assets and liabilities.

Members serving in the cabinet should not have any other employment, but Senators and Opposition Members can have another employment other than serving in the National Assembly.



RESOURCES

This section looks at the resources available to you as a Member of Parliament.

Resources and services

There are various resources and facilities available to Members upon request. The House has compiled a registry of past records. These contain relevant information pertaining to the business of the House that you may require, or that may assist you otherwise with your work. There is also a small library of law books that you are encouraged to use as a source of research and for legal advice on key components of your work such as in the process of drafting a law.

Information Technology support

The Central Information Technology Office (CITO), administered by the Ministry of Finance, is the available point of contact for Members in need of any ICT support. This service is accessible to Members whenever necessary and you are encouraged to make use of this facility.

Training

There is also a two-day parliamentary training programme held for Members, that seeks to equip you with the relevant information and skills that you will need in order to fulfil your parliamentary duties.

Stationery

Members are advised to bring their own stationery, however, the office can facilitate Members with writing material and printing upon request during House and Committee meetings.

Member Contact Information

Ministers of the government are given email addresses and a telephone extension number for work related to their Ministry. However, it is common practice in the National Assembly of Belize that other Members of Parliament, (both Opposition Members and Senators), use their personal email addresses and phone numbers for all parliamentary business.

Diplomatic Passports

The application process for a diplomatic passport can be facilitated by the Clerk, upon your request. The passport is the property of the Government of Belize, so you are required to return the passport once you retire your post.

Communications

All internal and external communications will be highlighted to new Members during the two-day training programme that will be delivered during the commencement of your term.

Should you require further details on the Communications of the House, you are welcome to contact:

Government of Belize Press Office National Assembly Building, Belmopan (501) 822-0759/0094 info@pressoffice.gov.bz

WELFARE OF MEMBERS AND PARLIAMENTARY STAFF

This section will look at how Members and staff can keep safe on the precincts of the Assembly, who to contact in the case of an emergency and what to do.

Security Management

The security of the parliament building is outsourced to the Police Department. They are responsible for checking that the building is safe and secure for Members, staff and other invited guests, before meetings by thoroughly screening all visitors upon arrival. Any external visitors (who are not Members or otherwise considered parliamentary staff), such as members of the press, are expected to present a form of identification before they are given permission to enter meetings or are granted access to the public galleries.

Police officers are present for, and take particular caution during House and Senate meetings, and during Committee meetings upon the Clerk's request.

Personal Responsibilities

Carry ID

Responsibility for the safety and welfare of Members and all parliamentary staff lies with both Parliament and the individual being protected. For your own safety, all Members and parliamentary staff are encouraged to carry a form of identification with them whilst on the parliamentary premises at all times, so that in the case of an emergency you are quickly and easily identified and relevant persons can be alerted instantaneously.

You may notice that the police officers assigned to monitor the parliament building are familiar with existing Members and parliamentary staff. Don't be afraid to acquaint yourself with them to make their task in being able to identify you, and also differentiate between you and external visitors, that much easier.

Be alert and report suspicious activity

Members and parliamentary staff must remain vigilant and alert whilst in the National Assembly building and are urged to report any suspicious activity that feels misplaced or out of the ordinary to either a police officer patrolling the building or to a member of staff.

Lock up your belongings

All Members and parliamentary staff are responsible for their own belongings and should ensure all confidential documents are kept private.

In an emergency

In the case of an emergency, you are advised to alert the closest stationed police officer. If the danger is surrounding you, you are expected to make the appropriate phone call to the police and remain calm. As there are likely police within the building or within close proximity of the building carrying out their screening duties, you may find that the police response time is quicker.

The police will attempt to isolate the danger zone and, alongside any other emergency services required, tackle the problem to ensure your safety.

CODE OF CONDUCT

Members of the National Assembly must at all times adhere to section 121 of the Belize Constitution "Code of Conduct."

The Code of Conduct establishes the standards and principles of conduct expected from Members and as been agreed by the House.

"The persons to whom this section applies shall conduct themselves in such a way as to not -

(a) to place themselves in positions in which they have or could have a conflict of interest;
(b) to compromise the fair exercise of their public or official functions and duties;
(c) to use their office for private gain;
(d) to demean their office or position;
(e) to allow their integrity to be called into question; or
(f) to endanger or diminish respect for, or confidence in, the integrity of the Government."

Members are responsible for familiarising themselves with the Code of Conduct and adhering to it.



PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURES

Standing Orders

Standing Orders are the written rules which regulate the proceedings of the House, and, as Members, you are expected to read, understand, and familiarise yourselves with this document.

House sittings

Although there is no scheduled time for sittings, the Standing Orders provide that House meetings should be held every Friday and that Senate meetings are to take place every Tuesday. A sitting on any other day of the week, is therefore considered a special sitting. Standing Orders; and to otherwise conduct themselves in a fit and proper manner.

interrupt, except in accordance with these

The Standing Orders of the House of Representatives was made under the provisions of section 17 of the British Honduras Constitution Ordinance 1963.

Debates

Debates take place during the second reading of a Bill, or immediately after the introduction of a Motion. Members present in the House during a debate are required to enter or leave the House with decorum; maintain silence while another Member is speaking, to not Here are a few guidelines you are required to adhere to during debates:

Time and Manner

- Before a Member speaks, he/she must rise and wait to be acknowledged by the Speaker.

- The Member must direct his/her observations to the Speaker.

- There is no time limit for Members to speak during debates.

- Members cannot speak out of turn.

- A Member who has spoken on a question may be heard again to clarify the part of their speech which they allege has been misquoted or misrepresented but cannot introduce a new matter.

- Members cannot read the entirety of a speech; but rather seek permission from the Speaker to, read extracts from written or printed papers or books in support of their argument.

- Members cannot speak on any question after it has been put to the vote by the Speaker.

For clarity on the above, as well as more information and relevant details on the time and manner of debating, please kindly refer to Standing Order 35 for more details.

Contents of Speeches

In debating, all Members must:

- Ensure that debates and contributions are relevant to the subject matter;

- Refrain from referencing a matter that is pending a judicial decision;

- Refrain from reviving a matter once the House had concluded on it during the Session;

- Refrain from using offensive or insulting language about Members;

- Refrain from imputing improper motives to any other Member of either Chamber;

- Refrain from referring to another Member by name, but rather, the name of the electoral area for which they have been elected;

- Refrain from using Her Majesty's name or the Governor General's name to influence the Speaker. For more details pertaining to the above, please kindly refer to Standing Order 38. Interruptions

Members are required to refrain from interrupting another Member unless they are; rising to a point of order; elucidating some matter raised by that Member in the course of his/her speech; or rising to claim closure under Standing Order No. 41 (Closure of Debate).

For relevant information on the exceptions to the above regulations, please kindly refer to Standing Order 37.

Oral and written questions

Members are expected to write to the Speaker informing of the question that they would like to ask, and, in return, the Speaker sends the approval. The office of the Clerk then sends the question to the Minister whom the question is directed to. Notice of question must be given at least five days before a sitting.

Kindly refer to Standing Orders 18, 19 and 20 for more details on the nature, notice and contents of questions.



Chamber from the Gallery view in the House of Representatives, $\ensuremath{\mathsf{Parliament}}$ of Belize

Swearing In

Members are sworn in during an inaugural sitting of the National Assembly after a

General Election. Typically, the Clerk of the House, immediately succeeding the election of a Speaker and Deputy Speaker, administers the oath or affirmation of allegiance first to the Speaker and Deputy Speaker, and then to the other Members of the House.

In accordance with the Belize Constitution, no Member of either House is able to sit, vote, receive any salary or emoluments in respect of his/her office until they have taken the oath of allegiance and office.

The Oath and Affirmation of Office read as follows:

Oath of Allegiance and Office

I, _____, do swear that I will bear true faith and allegiance to Belize, and will uphold the Constitution and the law, and that I will conscientiously, impartially and to the best of my ability discharge my duties as [_____] and do right to all manner of people without fear or favour, affection or ill-will. [So help me, God.]

Affirmation of Allegiance and Office

I, _____, do solemnly and sincerely affirm and declare that I will bear true faith and allegiance to Belize, and will uphold the Constitution and the law, and that I will conscientiously, impartially and to the best of my ability discharge my duties as [_____] and do right to all manner of people without fear or favour, affection or illwill.

International and Inter-Parliamentary Bodies

The National Assembly of Belize works with various international, regional and interparliamentary bodies including:

- Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). Belize is also a member of the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region of the CPA.

- Forum of Speakers/Presidents of National Parliaments/Legislative Assemblies/Congresses of Central America and the Caribbean Basin (FOPREL)

- ParlAmericas

- Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)

-The Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS/OSE)

Members will be given all the relevant information pertaining to the work of these organisations during the two-day parliamentary training programme.

COMMITTEES

Committee work plays a large role in the overall running of an effective Parliament. This section outlines what Committees are available to you and how you can join them.

Committees

There are 13 Standing Committees; *Finance* and Economic Development; Public Utilities, Transport and Communications; Health and Human Development, including Rural Development and Culture; Education, Sports and Housing; Constitution and Foreign Affairs, Privileges, Standing Orders, House and Regulations; Works; Public Service, Labour, Industry and Trade; Natural Resources and the Environment; National Security and Immigration; Agriculture and Fisheries; Public Accounts; Tourism, Archaeology and Information; Ombudsman Reports.

The Committee of Supply is a committee of the whole House.

There is also a Committee of Selection. The Speaker selects six Members (four from government and two from the Opposition) to form the Committee of Selection.

The Prime Minister, alongside the Cabinet, typically identify the Members from government that will sit on each Standing Committee (providing that no Minister is appointed to a standing committee which deals with any subject or matter assigned to that Minister) and the Leader of the Opposition identifies the two Opposition Members.

On the first working meeting after general elections, the Committee of Selection meets before any other business on the agenda in order to

consider and report to the House on the appointment of Members to the thirteen Standing Committees.

Committee Meetings

Committee meetings are scheduled in accordance with their relevance in relation to the Bills and Motions referred to after the first reading and introduction. The committee meetings can happen as early as on the same day of the sitting (sitting can be suspended to allow committees to meet) or on an alternative date set by the Chairperson of the committee. The Committee of the Whole however, always take place once the Bills have gone through their second reading.



PARLIAMENTARY STAFF: THEIR ROLES AND THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY STAFF COMMITTEE

This section will introduce you to the parliamentary staff who are on hand to help you throughout your time as a Member of Parliament.



Clerk Eddie Webster Email: <u>websterej@gobmail.gov.bz</u> / <u>CEO.NationalAssembly@bna.gov.bz;</u> Ext: 84406

Responsible for the overall management and the financial affairs of the National Assembly.



Deputy Clerk Clarita Pech Email: <u>pechcv@gobmail.gov.bz</u> / <u>CEO.NationalAssembly@bna.gov.bz;</u> Ext: 84407

Responsible for: assisting the Clerk in the management of the National Assembly; the administration and supervision of personnel; the checking and editing of verbatims and minutes of House and Senate, among other documents; liaising with Ministries for matters to be placed on the orders of the day; and any other duties assigned from time to time



Finance Officer I Valentina Sho Emmanuel Email: <u>shove@gobmail.gov.bz</u> / <u>accountssection.legislature@bna.gov.bz</u> Ext: 84410

Responsible for executing the financial affairs of the National Assembly, including salaries, allowances, deductions, claims and income tax; the preparation and monitoring of the annual budget for the National Assembly, the offices of the Integrity Commission, Ombudsman and Contractor General; and any other duties assigned from time to time.



Senior Clerk Assistant Eudice Gibson Email: <u>gibsonef@gobmail.gov.bz</u> Ext: 84409

Responsible for secretarial duties including: the checking and editing of Senate minutes and verbatims; assist with the editing of House verbatims; the preparation of Bills to be printed in Bill form and Act form, prepare sealing copies assented to by the Governor-General for publication as Acts; route relevant Papers and motions to the different Ministries; update Bill Book, Act Book and Sessional Paper Book immediately after meetings; assist in the preparation and organizing of seminars, meetings and conferences; and any other duties assigned from time to time.



Parliamentary Officer I Ingrid Soriano Email: <u>sorianoiy@gobmail.gov.bz</u> Ext: 84408

Responsible for the preparation and compilation of documents for House of Representative meetings (Agendas, Bills, Motions, Papers, etc.) sent to Members for scheduled meetings; transcription of verbatims, preparation of minutes, reports and amendment of law books, and any other duties assigned from time to time.



Parliamentary Officer I Mary August Email: <u>augustmv@gobmail.gov.bz</u> Ext: 84953

Responsible for the preparation and compilation of Senate meeting documents (Agenda, Bills, Motions, Papers, etc.) sent to Senators for scheduled meetings; transcription of verbatims; preparation of minutes and reports and amendment of law books, and any other duties assigned from time to time.



Auxiliary Accounting Assistant Jenny Coc Email: <u>cocje@gobmail.gov.bz</u> / <u>accountssection.legislature@bna.gov.bz</u> Ext: 84411

Responsible for: invoice payments; preparing purchase orders; updating/filing accounting records; printing pay sheets for the National Assembly and the Offices of the Ombudsman, Contractor General, and Integrity Commission; inventory management on the procurement and use of supplies, insurance, etc. for the National Assembly; and any other duties assigned from time to time.



Records and Research Officer Frank Cruz Email: <u>cruzfr@gobmail.gov.bz</u> Ext: 84413

Responsible for: research on Statutory Instruments (S.Is) and verbatims for Members and Ministries upon request; preparation of documents for the annual bounding of verbatims, S.Is, Bills. Acts, orders of the day, and minutes; the overall management and safeguarding of records in the records section; and any other duties assigned from time to time.



Office Assistant/Caretaker/Security Officer Alex Emmanuel Ext: 84412

Responsible for ensuring that the different offices, rooms, Chamber and public galleries are kept clean at all times; ensure that the National Assembly complex and offices are secure at all times; collection and delivery of mail and items related to the functions of the National Assembly; printing, photocopying of Sessional Papers and different documents related to the National Assembly; and do purchases in and around Belmopan, and any other duties assigned on a timely basis.

National Assembly Staff Committee

There is a committee which consist of Members of the House and Senate (6 members) called the National Assembly Staff Committee. The staff representative, which is a staff member, or it can be any other person from outside the department, is also part of the committee. This committee deals with matters relating to the staff of the National Assembly such as: recruitment of staff, confirmation, disciplinary control, promotions, study leaves, and the removal of staff from office, excluding the Clerk and Deputy Clerk.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Belize Constitution, Chapter 4, as in force March 1, 2017 http://aceproject.org/ero-en/regions/americas/BZ/belize-constitution-2017

Standing Orders of the House of Representatives <u>https://www.nationalassembly.gov.bz/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Standing-Orders-of-House.pdf</u>

Standing Orders of the Senate https://www.nationalassembly.gov.bz/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Standing-Orders-of-the-Senate.pdf

Legislative Assembly (Powers and Privileges) No. 23 of 1962 <u>https://nationalassembly.gov.bz/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Legislative-Powers-updated.pdf</u>

National Assembly Pensions Act, 1989, revised 2000 http://www.belizelaw.org/web/lawadmin/PDF%20files/cap008.pdf

For more information on the contents of the handbook, refer to numbers below pertaining to the relevant department:

Office Number: 822-2141 Clerk: 636-5066/822-2144/828-4406 Deputy Clerk: 822-2142/ 828-4407 Fax Number: 822-3889

For information on relavant documents referenced throughout the handbook, please go to:

https://www.nationalassembly.gov.bz/

ABOUT THE CPA

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) connects, develops, promotes and supports parliamentarians and their staff to identify benchmarks of good governance and the implementation of the enduring values of the Commonwealth. The CPA collaborates with parliaments and other organisations, including the intergovernmental community, to achieve its statement of purpose. It brings parliamentarians and parliamentary staff together to exchange ideas among themselves and with experts in various fields, to identify benchmarks of good practices and new policy options they can adopt or adapt in the governance of their societies.




Image credits: CPA Secretariat and CPA Branches, Shutterstock file images and freepik.com

Published by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). Registered Charity Number 263147.

CPA Headquarters Secretariat Richmond House, Houses of Parliament London SW1A 0AA United Kingdom

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7799 1460 Email: hq.sec@cpahq.org Website: www.cpahq.org