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**OLLS MEMORANDUM  
BILL TITLES - SINGLE SUBJECT  
AND ORIGINAL PURPOSE REQUIREMENTS**

This memorandum is intended to provide guidance regarding the single subject and original purpose requirements for bills under the Colorado Constitution. This memorandum discusses the following topics:

- I. The single subject and original requirements for bills and bill titles;
  - II. Factors that should be considered by the Colorado General Assembly when there is a question whether an amendment to a bill fits within the title of the bill; and
  - III. Title opinions.
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**I. SINGLE SUBJECT AND ORIGINAL PURPOSE REQUIREMENTS**

**(1) Constitutional Requirements for Bill Titles**

Article V, sections 21 and 17 of the Colorado Constitution provide as follows:

**Section 21. Bill to contain but one subject - expressed in title.** No bill, except general appropriation bills, shall be passed containing more than one subject, which shall be clearly expressed in its title; but if any subject shall be embraced in any act which shall not be expressed in the title, such act shall be void only as to so much thereof as shall not be so expressed.

**Section 17. No law passed but by bill - amendments.** No law shall be passed except by bill, and no bill shall be so altered or amended on its passage through either house as to change its original purpose.

Sections 17 and 21 are constitutional rules of legislative procedure. The "subject" of a bill and its "original purpose" are similar concepts. An amendment that alters the original purpose of a bill may well cause the bill to embrace two subjects.

These sections of the Colorado Constitution mandate that each bill contain one subject and that the single subject be clearly expressed in the bill title. In addition, these provisions appear to place fairly strict limits on the types of extraneous amendments that may be added as a bill moves through the legislative process. It is generally agreed that the purpose of these provisions is to focus debate on pending legislative measures and to avoid "log-rolling"

(the joining together of unrelated measures to gain votes for passage of a measure). Another purpose is to provide helpful public notice of the contents of a bill. The importance of these rules is illustrated by the constitutional requirement in Section 21 that failure to comply will invalidate the portion of a bill that is not expressed in the bill title.

Pursuant to these mandates, the Office of Legislative Legal Services (OLLS) has adopted a general policy of composing bill titles in a manner that states the single subject at the beginning of the bill title. To help identify clearly a bill's single subject, a comma is often placed at the end of the subject. Another common practice is to avoid the words "and" and "or" in stating the single subject because these words connote more than one subject. Sometimes additional information is provided after the comma as a "trailer". While trailers must be "germane", or related, to the single subject, the words of the trailer generally are not part of the statement of the single subject.

The OLLS attempts to follow these practices as practicable. These practices have helped members and the public in the application of Sections 17 and 21 and have become generally accepted over a period of many years.

## **(2) "Tight" Titles**

Close adherence to the Colorado legislative custom and practice relating to composition and strict construction of bill titles has contributed to the time-honored practice of employment of "tight" titles. "Tight" titles narrowly express the single subject and purpose of a bill. Sponsors request tight titles anticipating that amendments that do not "fit" within the narrow statement will be deemed out of order during the legislative process. Of course, the tight titles themselves must comply with the mandates of Sections 17 and 21 of Article V.

## **(3) Application of Sections 17 and 21 in the Legislative Process and in the Courts**

The OLLS has observed that the requirements of Sections 17 and 21, and the attendant legislative customs and usage, are more often strictly applied in the legislative process. Since these rules are rules of legislative procedure, this seems entirely appropriate.

The courts apply Sections 17 and 21 in a different context than the General Assembly. The courts consider these provisions in legal proceedings after the presumption of constitutionality has attached to the enacted law in question. This has resulted in a more lenient application of the requirements of these sections in judicial proceedings. Only in the most extreme case will an enacted law be ruled unconstitutional by a court on this basis.

#### **(4) Consequences of Departure From the Mandates of Sections 17 and 21 and Legislative Custom and Usage**

If the constitutional mandates regarding bill subjects titles and the legislative custom and usage arising from these mandates are not observed in the legislative process, the consequences include:

- Loss of predictability in the consideration of bills;
- Frustration of the purposes of the constitutional mandates, such as focusing debate, avoiding log-rolling, and providing adequate public notice;
- Deprivation of a member's ability to address issues in a limited context through the use of a "tight" title;
- The possibility of increased litigation over bills already passed, with the attendant uncertainty of application of laws; and
- Erosion of the public's confidence in the legislative process.

It cannot be said with certainty in every case that departure from the rules will invalidate a bill. However, in view of the consequences outlined above, we recommend compliance with the rules and with the practices that encourage compliance with those rules. These practices have proven themselves over the long term and are rooted in the integrity of the legislative process.

## **II. DETERMINING WHETHER AMENDMENTS FIT WITHIN BILL TITLES**

To determine whether an amendment fits within a bill title, the following questions should be addressed:

### **(1) Does the amendment fit within the single subject of the bill expressed in the bill title?**

Under the Colorado Constitution, no bill (other than a general appropriation bill) containing more than a single subject may be passed by the General Assembly, and the single subject of a bill must be expressed in the bill's title. Colo. Const., Art. V, § 21. If this provision of the Constitution is violated in an act, then the portions of the act that are not within the title are void. *People ex rel. Seeley v. Hull*, 8 Colo. 485, 9 P. 34 (1885). However, the Colorado Supreme Court has stated that this section of the Constitution should be liberally and reasonably interpreted so as to avert the evils against which it is aimed, while at the same time not unnecessarily obstructing legislation. *In re Breene*, 14 Colo. 401, 758

P.2d 1356 (1890).

In determining whether an amendment fits within the single subject expressed in the title of the bill, the following should be considered:

**(a) Is the amendment "germane" to the subject matter of the bill?** -- The Colorado Supreme Court has found that whether an amendment fits within the title of a bill is dependent on whether the amendment is "germane" to the subject expressed in the title of the bill. *Bd. of Comm'rs v. Bd. of Comm'rs*, 32 Colo. 310, 76 P. 368 (1904). The Court has further found that in this context "germane" means "closely allied", "appropriate", or "relevant". *Roark v. People*, 79 Colo. 181, 48 P.2d 1013 (1935); *Dahlin v. City & County of Denver*, 97 Colo. 239, 48 P.2d 1013 (1935). The Court has stated that if the matters contained in a bill are "necessarily or properly connected to each other", rather than being "disconnected or incongruous", then the provisions of Section 21 of the Constitution are not violated. *In re House Bill No. 1353*, 738 P.2d 371 (Colo. 1987).

**(b) May the title of the bill be modified to accommodate the amendment?** -- The title to a bill may be narrowed by amendment. If a bill title has been narrowed during the legislative process, then the practice and understanding in the General Assembly has been that the bill title may then be broadened by amendment as long as the amendment does not broaden the single subject or the original purpose of the bill as it was introduced.

The original subject matter of a bill, as expressed in the title of the bill, may not be broadened, although the title may be amended to cover the original purpose of the bill as extended by amendments. *In re Amendments of Legislative Bills*, 19 Colo. 356, 35 P. 917 (1894). This may mean that, while the subject of the bill expressed in the title may not be broadened, the trailer to the title, if any, may be modified when the bill is amended. In view of the constitutional implications that may arise if the single subject or original purpose of a bill is changed, the safest course of action is to avoid broadening the single subject of a bill expressed in the title, while making changes to the trailer as necessary to reflect changes made to the bill.

**(2) Would the amendment change the original purpose of the bill as it was introduced in the General Assembly?**

The Colorado Constitution prohibits any amendment that changes the **original purpose** of a bill. Colo. Const., Art. V, § 17. The courts have found that this provision does not prohibit an amendment that **extends the provisions of the bill** without changing the original purpose. *In re Amendments of Legislative Bills*, 19 Colo. 356, 35 P. 917 (1894). Further, an amendment to a bill does not violate this section if the amendment is **a change in the means of accomplishing** the bill's original purpose. *Parrish v. Lamm*, 758 P.2d 1356 (Colo. 1988).

### (3) Are the constitutional standards for amendments applied strictly?

The General Assembly has normally applied the constitutional standards for amendments in a strict fashion, while the courts, when making similar determinations regarding laws that have been enacted, have shown deference to the judgment of the General Assembly. The presumption is that laws that have been enacted are constitutional, and a person who challenges the constitutionality of a statute must prove the unconstitutionality beyond a reasonable doubt. *People v. Rowerdink*, 756 P.2d 986 (Colo. 1988). For this reason, the final outcome reached by a court regarding an amendment should be considered within the appropriate context of the decision and not be applied directly to the legislative process.

#### Examples of Title Questions:

**Example 1:** The bill title is "Concerning fruit." and the bill as introduced deals with apples and pears. The amendment would add a provision concerning oranges. To determine whether the amendment fits within the title of the bill, it is necessary to determine whether oranges are germane to the subject of fruit and whether this amendment would change the original purpose of the bill. As oranges are a type of fruit, this amendment apparently is germane to the subject of the bill as expressed in the title. Oranges are closely allied with and relevant to the subject of fruit. Further, the addition of oranges appears to extend the provisions of the bill without changing the original purpose of the bill.

**Result:** The amendment fits within the title of the bill.

**Example 2:** The bill title is "Concerning apples." and the bill as introduced deals only with apples. The amendment would add a provision concerning oranges. In this case, the question is whether oranges are germane to the subject "apples". Oranges do not appear to be relevant to or closely allied with apples. The original purpose of the bill now regards the more narrow subject of apples, and the addition of oranges apparently will modify this original purpose, rather than simply extending the provisions of the bill or changing the means of accomplishing the original purpose.

**Result:** The amendment is not within the title of the bill.

**Example 3:** The bill title is "Concerning fruit, and, in connection therewith, providing for apples and peaches." and the bill as introduced deals only with apples and peaches. The single subject expressed in the title is "Concerning fruit", while the remainder of the title is the trailer. The amendment would add a provision concerning oranges. Oranges appear to be germane to the bill subject as oranges are closely allied with and relevant to the subject of fruit. However, if the amendment is adopted, the original title may no longer accurately describe the subject matter of the bill unless the trailer to the title is also amended.

**Result:** The amendment is within the title of the bill. The trailer to the title may be modified to reflect the amendment, such as amending the trailer to read: "and, in connection therewith, providing for apples, peaches, and oranges."

### III. TITLE OPINIONS

In February of 1995, concern was expressed during a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Legislative Council about opinions of OLLS staff as to whether an amendment would be appropriate under the title of a bill. Discussion focused on the fact that asking for a title opinion may place OLLS staff in an awkward situation that is inappropriate for nonpartisan staff personnel. An OLLS staff member should bring any potential title issues to the attention of his or her team leader and the Director or Deputy Director as soon as the issues arise.

The Executive Committee provided the OLLS with the following guidance concerning the issuance of title opinions:

1. An OLLS staff person should continue to consider title issues carefully when drafting bills and amendments and should advise a member when the member requests an amendment that may be beyond the title of a bill.
2. Once a bill or amendment is drafted, the OLLS staff should handle requests for title opinions as follows:
  - An OLLS staff member may provide the member with an answer to a title question, but the staff member should make it clear to the member that **the opinion is advisory only and is not binding on a committee chair or the chair of the committee of the whole.**
  - An OLLS staff person should not put title opinions in writing unless the member insists. In this situation, the member should be advised that the OLLS will speak with the members of the Executive Committee from the member's house prior to writing the title opinion.