INTRODUCTION TO THE COA HOUSE OF DELEGATES

OVERVIEW

The House of Delegates (“House”) is truly where COA members take ownership of the Association. As COA’s official policy-making body, the House consists of delegations of COA members from each local optometric society who meet once a year at the Association’s annual convention to vote on COA policy resolutions and bylaws amendments, adopt the Association’s budget and elect COA’s trustees and officers.

All members of the House are charged with the duty to consider the welfare of the Association, the profession of optometry as a whole, improvement of the health of the public and the wishes of their societies.

The House is a forum for discussion where all members serving as delegates may speak and vote. Being a delegate is an important responsibility because you represent the membership. As a delegate, you debate the issues, make the amendments, and cast the votes that shape COA’s policies. Most importantly, you have the right to write and submit resolutions to the House. We encourage everyone to assert their right to submit and debate resolutions.

COA’s policies are created and changed by the House. This body determines COA’s official views on all issues. By contrast, COA’s Board of Trustees (Board) is charged with managing COA’s corporate affairs and day-to-day business in a manner consistent with general COA policy. Because the House is similar in concept to the United States Congress, COA’s policies are set when its members submit resolutions to the House of “representatives.” Similar to a bill in Congress, a resolution is a call for COA to endorse a certain principle, change its internal structure, or even eliminate a past policy that no longer represents the current view of the membership.

Resolutions are sent to the societies well in advance of the scheduled meeting of the COA House of Delegates. Each society designates its official delegation, whose responsibilities include coordinating a discussion of the proposed resolutions and bylaws amendments. Local societies should then consider, discuss and vote on each resolution or bylaws amendment prior to convening of the House, thus instructing their delegation how to vote.
WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF COA POLICIES?

In the broadest sense, “policy” is a broad statement that informs decision-making and action of the Board of Trustees, its standing committees and other COA entities. The House of Delegates is responsible for several types of policy resolutions:

1. Statements on the standards of practice of the profession that provide direction to member optometrists.
2. Position statements on external issues affecting the profession.
3. Statements on the organization, governance, and functioning of the organization.
4. Directives, which are statements by the House to the Board about actions that the organization or the Board should take; for example, study an issue and report back to the House, or advocate a specific position.

Proposed resolutions require the support of simple majority of the House to be adopted, except as otherwise indicated in COA’s Bylaws.

WHAT ARE BYLAWS AND HOW CAN THEY BE AMENDED?

Bylaws are a required element when forming a corporation. They serve as a form of agreement or contract between the corporation and its owners to conduct itself in a certain way. While for a commercial business the owners are its shareholders, the ownership of a nonprofit corporation such as COA belongs to the members. COA’s Bylaws are a legal document outlining the self-imposed rules that will regulate the Association’s actions. As such they should be broad statements that will remain relevant for a number of years. COA’s Bylaws can only be amended by action of the House of Delegates. A major revision of the COA Bylaws last occurred in 2007.

COA’s Bylaws are organized into the following categories or “Articles”:

I. Membership
II. Voting Power
III. Meetings of Members
IV. Corporate Duties and Powers
V. Officers
VI. Committees and Councils
VII. Executive Director
VIII. Code of Ethics
IX. Dues
X. American Optometric Association
XI. Miscellaneous
XII. Amendments of Bylaws
XIII. Sections
The process for amending COA’s Bylaws appears in Article XII of that document. Societies may submit Bylaws amendments to the Board of Trustees, through the COA Central Office, not less than 90 days prior to the convening of the House of Delegates. Bylaws amendments may also be proposed by Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees shall submit all proposed bylaws amendments to the Secretary/Treasurer not less than 75 days prior to the convening of the House of Delegates.

The societies will receive notice of the proposed amendments no later then 60 days prior to the start of the House of Delegates. The same process and deadlines hold true for resolutions regarding dues increases or the establishment of special assessments. A two-thirds (2/3) vote of the House is necessary to amend bylaws, except for proposed amendments to Article VIII, “Code of Ethics,” which requires a three-fourths (3/4) vote to be adopted.

**HOW DOES THE HOUSE OPERATE?**

Since the House normally meets only once a year, many important issues must be considered and decisions made at its annual session. The volume and complexity of the issues which are placed before the House make it impossible to handle without having a well-established routine for conducting business. This routine demands the close cooperation of the members of the House, the Board of Trustees, officers and COA staff.

Except where inconsistent with COA Bylaws, the House is governed in all its deliberations by *Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, as amended from time to time. *Robert’s Rules of Order* provides common rules and procedures for deliberation and debate in order to place the whole membership on the same footing and speaking the same language. The conduct of all business is controlled by the general will of the whole membership - the right of the deliberate majority to decide. *Robert’s Rules of Order* provides for constructive and democratic meetings and is designed to advance, not hinder, the business of the assembly. Under no circumstances should "undue strictness" be allowed to intimidate members or limit full participation.

Prior to considering any business, the House of Delegates will approve their rules of procedure or *standing rules*. These rules, formally known as “House of Delegates Procedures,” may alter from year-to-year and are intended to facilitate the business coming before the House. The 2008 standing rules were revised to accommodate the 2007 revisions to the COA Bylaws including the mandated use of reference committees, the elimination (by exclusion) of the Resolutions Committee and the change in charge of the Judicial Council.

The fundamental right of the House of Delegates as a deliberative assembly is to require all questions to be discussed to the satisfaction of its members before
action is taken. It should be remembered that the assembly rules and has the final say on everything. Silence means consent.

Before the House actually convenes at its annual meeting, local societies should discuss the resolutions and bylaws amendments with their delegations in order to reach consensus. Prior to an actual vote in the House, resolutions will be discussed in reference committees. The reference committees are composed of three or more COA delegates or alternates appointed by the Speaker who read, take testimony on and present recommendations about the resolutions to the full House (again like congressional committees). It is expected that the author of the proposed resolution or bylaws amendment submit oral testimony to the reference committee defending the rationale of the proposed resolution or bylaws amendment.

During the reference committee hearings, which are open to all those authorized to attend the COA House of Delegates, members may also give their testimony and opinions about the proposed resolutions or bylaws amendments, either as individual members or as a representative for their society. The reference committee then meets in private to consider the testimony and prepare a report to be presented to the House when the resolution or bylaws change is considered.

At the House of Delegates, the reference committee chair(s) should be prepared to comment on the committee position taken in the report and provide an explanation of this decision prior to recommending that a resolution be adopted, rejected, amended, postponed indefinitely or replaced by a substitute resolution to the house. The House should consider the recommendations of the reference committee but is not obligated to support them.

**COMMITTEES AND OFFICERS OF THE HOUSE OF DELEGATES**

**Speaker of the House**

The Speaker of the House of Delegates is the presiding officer at all meetings of the House of Delegates and performs such duties as custom and parliamentary usage require, including the designation of the official parliamentary procedure to govern the actions of the House and the assignment of items to be considered by any reference committees.

**Vice-Speaker of the House**

The Vice-Speaker of the House of Delegates assists the Speaker in the performance of his or her duties and performs the duties of the Speaker when the Speaker requests him or her to do so, or when the Speaker is unable to act.

**Parliamentarian**
The parliamentarian is responsible for resolving all disputes as they pertain to the conduct of the House and advises the Speaker on parliamentary procedures. The parliamentarian should serve as a resource to the Speaker and all House committees.

**Reference Committees**

Delegates or alternates who want to gain in-depth exposure to COA’s policy-making process can volunteer to serve on a reference committee by submitting their names to the Speaker of the House. Each reference committee is responsible for collecting the testimony of delegates, members, and other interested parties within its jurisdiction, and making formal recommendation to the House to accept as written, amend or reject each resolution. This process entails work but provides a unique experience.

Each reference committee is composed of an odd number of Delegates, chairperson and at least two others. There may be as many as three or four committees, each of which focuses on topics such as finance, membership categories and dues; external policy (e.g., definition of a comprehensive eye exam); and the regulation of the optometric profession.

Prior to consideration by the House, each reference committee holds an open meeting to hear the testimony concerning the proposed resolutions and bylaws amendments. Following the open hearing, the reference committee retires in closed session to write their formal report and recommendation to the House. Writing recommendations is the most important part of the job, as the committee must consider the testimony of members with current COA policy and synthesize an appropriate recommendation to present to the House. The chair of the reference committee may enlist the help of COA Trustees, officers, or staff to clarify related issues or to assess the financial impact of an action.

The reference committee’s final responsibility is to attend the House session when its recommendations are presented by the chairperson in order to address any questions from the delegates.

**House of Delegates Advisory Committee**

This committee is responsible for advising the speaker and vice speaker on matters of business coming before the House and ensure the smooth functioning of House operations. The Speaker of the House shall chair and appoint members of the advisory committee. It is recommended that the COA parliamentarian be a consultant to the committee.

**Rules Committee**
As specified in Article III, Section 7(b) of the COA Bylaws, the Rules Committee consists of five delegates appointed by the Speaker prior to the annual meeting of the House. The Rules Committee reviews and prepares the Rules of Procedure intended to expedite the business of the House. The Rules Committee may also propose amendments to the Rules of Procedure during the meeting of the House of Delegates in order to facilitate business. It is recommended that the Rules Committee consult with the parliamentarian on amendments to the Rules of Procedure.

**Credentials Committee**

The Credentials Committee maintains the official roll of COA delegates entitled to vote in the business sessions of the House. Delegates must be verified ("credentialed") by the Credentials Committee before they are allowed to be seated on the House floor. The Speaker of the House will announce a "credentials report" to ensure that there is an official quorum to allow the House to conduct business and to cast votes on matters before it. Participation on the Credentials Committee is by appointment of the Speaker of the House and is open to any active member.

Each credentialed delegate will be issued a voting card. When a delegate leaves the floor when the House is in session, he/she must surrender the voting card. The voting card will then be issued to the alternate that replaces that delegate.

**Sergeants-at-Arms**

Sergeants-at-Arms serve as pages to the House and assist the Speaker of the House where necessary to maintain order and security. See Appendix D, "Charges to Sergeants-at-Arms."

**Nominating Committee**

The Nominating Committee provides nominees for the election of COA’s officers and Trustees at the annual meeting. It is a committee of the House intended to be free of undue influence by the COA or any of its members or entities. The Nominating Committee recommends a slate of officers and trustees to the House to be considered for election. It should be noted that COA’s Bylaws allow for nominations to any office or the Board of Trustees from the floor of the House without first being recommended by the Nominating Committee.

COA will cover the travel and lodging expenses associated with the House of Delegates meeting for the following individuals:

Speaker of the House, Student Delegates, Parliamentarian, COA Board of Trustees, Legal Counsel and the George I. Deane Jr., OD Student Leadership Award winners.
HOW COA MAKES POLICY

BEFORE THE HOUSE OF DELEGATES:

What follows is a quick overview of the COA policy-making process. You can get involved in almost every step along the way. The most exciting, of course, is to debate the policy when it goes before the House at its annual meeting, but there are some important steps that take place before that.

1. Think of an idea for change
Any member can write a resolution to create a new policy; change an existing policy; delete an old policy; change the Bylaws or direct the Board of Trustees to take certain actions.

2. Review current policy (if there is one)
The current COA Bylaws and policy resolutions adopted by the House of Delegates can be found on COA’s web site, www.coavision.org under “House of Delegates” in the Members Only section. These are the documents that define how COA works.

3. Write the resolution
A resolution has two parts:

- The PREAMBLE explains why the change should be made or why the actions need to be taken.
- The RESOLVED section is the new policy statement or what specifically you want COA to do.

It is important to note that the Preamble (“whereas” phrases) is not part of the policy statement. More information concerning the form and function of resolutions can be found in Robert’s Rules of Order. See the sample resolution contained in Appendix A. Also see the sample bylaws amendment contained in Appendix B.

4. Submit your resolution to the COA office
Resolutions must be submitted electronically to the COA office 75 days prior to the convening of the House. E-mail resolutions to mwhitlow@coavision.org. Resolutions may be introduced on the floor of the House of Delegates at a time set aside by the Speaker of the House usually referred to as new business. Resolutions emanating from the floor of the House must be heard and approved by the Reference Committee.

5. Societies meet to decide how their delegates will vote
It is extremely important that societies meet and discuss resolutions prior to the House. Each society should try to arrive at a consensus on each resolution and
identify any changes they would like to see for presentation to the reference committees during their public hearings or by amendment when taken up by the House.

AT THE HOUSE OF DELEGATES:

6. Reference Committees—Open Session
The reference committees have an open session to hear testimony from the sponsor of the resolution, Board of Trustees, societies and individual members who want to give testimony.

7. Reference Committees—Closed Session
Reference committees convene in closed session to assemble all of the testimony and to prepare a formal report and recommendation on each resolution.

8. House of Delegates
The chairperson of each reference committee gives the report to the House. Any delegate can speak or propose changes to a resolution when the reference committee’s report is taken up on the House floor. Each reference committee’s recommendation may be accepted, amended, or rejected by vote of the House. If the resolution is adopted, new COA Policy is established.

DELEGATE REPRESENTATION AND SELECTION

Any COA member in good standing in his or her society is eligible to serve as a delegate or an alternate. COA delegates are the Association’s policy makers; they vote on the policies that define what COA is and what it stands for. It is crucial for each local society to make its voice heard in the House through its delegation—this voice is the real ownership and heart of the Association.

How delegates are selected
According to COA’s Bylaws, “Each Society is entitled to representation by such Delegates in the proportion of one Delegate to each thirteen (13) active and life members with an additional delegate for a fraction of at least seven (7) members of thirteen (13). A Society with less than thirteen (13) members is eligible for one Delegate. All representation is based on dues from the preceding fiscal year calculated on the last day of that year using member dues not delinquent in excess of sixty (60) days."

Delegates and alternates are selected by their local societies for a one year term. The election is to take place no later than 90 days prior to the convening of the House. Names of the delegates representing local societies are to be submitted to COA’s Governance Coordinator, Michelle Harvey, at the COA office (mharvey@coavision.org).
Suggestions for delegates and alternate delegates

All members who will be serving as delegates should meet with their societies before the annual convention to discuss the resolutions and candidates for the Board of Trustees and COA officers. In this way, the delegates can better reflect the views of their societies when they vote in the annual meeting. It is vital that societies discuss the resolutions before they come to the convention; without prior discussion, it is very difficult to have an informed debate in the House.

Basic parliamentary procedure guidelines will be provided during the opening session of the House. Prior to the opening session of the House, a training session on parliamentary procedure will be held.
WHEREAS, the House of Delegates of the California Optometric Association each year approves the minutes of the previous year’s Annual Congress; and

WHEREAS, resolutions and Bylaws amendments discussed at the previous year’s House of Delegates are typically included within the text of the minutes of the Annual Congress but presented in a fashion that does not lend itself to an easy appreciation of the entire resolution or Bylaws amendment as adopted or as disapproved by the delegates; and

WHEREAS, it is critical for the House of Delegates to have at their disposal copies of the final version of the resolutions and Bylaws amendments as amended and approved or disapproved at the year’s Annual Congress; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Annual Congress of the California Optometric Association include as an attachment the final version of each resolution and Bylaws amendment presented at the House of Delegates and its final disposition.
Appendix B

Proposed Bylaws Amendment Number One
To The 2006 House of Delegates

Membership Eligibility Definition

Proposed by the COA Board of Trustees

COA Bylaws Article I, Section 5:

Section 5. Active Members: Active members in this Association and said Societies shall consist of those optometrists who hold a current unrestricted license in good standing to practice optometry under the laws of the State of California and who subscribe to the Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, Codified Policies, Rules and Regulations, Code of Ethics and Rules of Practice of this Association, and who are accepted for Active Membership as hereinafter set forth.
Appendix C

Summary of Robert's Rules of Order
For Fair and Orderly Meetings & Conventions

Obtain the floor (the right to speak) by being the first to stand at the microphone and being recognized by the Speaker of the House.

- Debate can not begin until the Speaker has stated the motion or resolution and asked "are you ready for the question?" If no one objects, the speaker calls for the vote.
- Before the motion is stated by the Speaker (the question) members may suggest modification of the motion (friendly amendment); the mover can modify as he pleases, or even withdraw the motion without consent of the seconder; if mover modifies the motion, the seconder can withdraw the second if he/she is not in agreement.
- The "immediately pending question" is the last question stated by the Speaker Motion/Resolution - Amendment - Motion to Postpone
- The member moving the "immediately pending question" is entitled to preference to the floor.
- No member can speak twice to the same issue until everyone else wishing to speak has spoken to it once.
- All remarks must be directed to the Speaker. Remarks must be courteous in language and deportment - avoid all personalities, never allude to others by name or to motives.
- The agenda and all committee reports are merely recommendations. When presented to the assembly and the question is stated, debate begins and changes occur.

The Rules

- **Point of Personal Privilege:** Pertains to noise, personal comfort, etc. - may interrupt only if necessary.
- **Parliamentary Inquiry:** Inquire as to the correct motion - to accomplish a desired result, or raise a point of order.
- **Point of Information:** Generally applies to information desired from the speaker: "I should like to ask the (speaker) a question."
- **Orders of the Day** (Agenda): A call to adhere to the agenda (a deviation from the agenda requires Suspending the Rules)
- **Point of Order:** Infraction of the rules, or improper decorum in speaking. Must be raised immediately after the error is made
- **Main Motion:** Brings new business (the next item on the agenda) before the assembly.
- **Divide the Question:** Divides a motion into two or more separate motions (must be able to stand on their own)
- **Consider by Paragraph:** Adoption of the text of a resolution is held until all paragraphs are debated and amended and the entire resolution is satisfactory; after all paragraphs are considered, the entire resolution is then open to amendment, and paragraphs may be further amended. Any Preamble (“whereas” phrases) cannot be considered until debate on the main motion (“be it resolved” phrases) has ceased.

- **Amend:** Inserting or striking out words or paragraphs, or substituting whole paragraphs or resolutions

- **Friendly Amendment:** An amendment offered by someone in sympathy with the purpose of the main motion, in the belief that the amendment will either improve or clarify the statement.

- **Withdraw/Modify Motion:** Applies only after question is stated; mover can accept an amendment without obtaining the floor

- **Commit /Refer/Recommit to Committee:** State the committee to receive the question or resolution; if no committee exists include size of committee desired and method of selecting the members (election or appointment).

- **Extend Debate:** Applies only to the immediately pending question; extends until a certain time or for a certain period of time

- **Limit Debate:** Closing debate at a certain time, or limiting to a certain period of time

- **Postpone to a Certain Time:** State the time the motion or agenda item will be resumed

- **Object to Consideration:** Objection must be stated before discussion or another motion is stated

- **Lay on the Table:** Temporarily suspends further consideration/action on pending question; may be made after motion to close debate has carried or is pending

- **Take from the Table:** Resumes consideration of item previously "laid on the table" - state the motion to take from the table

- **Reconsider a Motion:** Can be made only by one on the prevailing side who has changed position or view

- **Postpone Indefinitely:** Kills the question/resolution for this session - exception: the motion to reconsider can be made this session

- **Previous Question:** Closes debate if successful - may be moved to "Close Debate" if preferred

- **Appeal Decision of the Speaker:** Appeal for the assembly to decide - must be made before other business is resumed; NOT debatable if relates to decorum, violation of rules or order of business

- **Suspend the Rules:** Allows a violation of the assembly’s own rules (except Constitution); the object of the suspension must be specified.

**Note:** The official Robert’s “Motions Chart” can be found at: [http://www.robertsrules.org/motions.htm](http://www.robertsrules.org/motions.htm)
Appendix D

Charge to Sergeants-at-Arms

The Sergeants-at-Arms are to be properly and distinctively identified.

The Sergeants-at-Arms will also have the duty to function as “pages” in transmitting messages to persons in the restricted delegates’ seating area from the “gallery” and other outside sources.

Maintain a bulletin board in the rear of the House of Delegates (depending upon physical arrangements) to be utilized to post non-urgent messages for delegates, etc.

The Sergeants-at-Arms will monitor the quality and utilization of audiovisuals, including the floor microphones in the House of Delegates.

The Sergeants-at-Arms are responsible for controlling the access to the House of Delegates room and the delegates seating area.

The Sergeants-at-Arms will assist in monitoring orderly access to and line-up in the credentialing desk area.

The Sergeants-at-Arms are responsible for maintaining order in the House of Delegates meeting room (including the gallery) and adjacent areas. Maintaining order includes not only decorum of occupants, but also the noise level, lighting, temperature, etc.

The Sergeants-at-Arms are responsible for enforcement of restricted seating areas within the House to include the reserved tables for the COA Board, guests, staff, press, etc.

The Sergeants-at-Arms are responsible for notifying the Speaker of the House of the arrival of distinguished guests, speakers, and visitors. The Sergeants-at-Arms are to direct and escort such dignitaries to their seats in the House. The Congress Manager is to provide the Sergeants-at-Arms with a daily listing of expected dignitaries.

The Sergeants-at-Arms are responsible for the distribution of handout materials and the collection of same within the House.

The Sergeants-at-Arms are responsible for the placement, retention, and retrieval of all society and other table signs, posters, panel speaker signs, lectern signs, and COA Congress wall banner in the House Meeting Room.
The Sergeants-at-Arms are responsible for designating the caucus area(s) in which society delegates and other groups can convene.

The Sergeants-at-Arms are responsible for monitoring the numerical strength of the delegates, ensuring the proper number for a quorum of the House.
REFERENCE COMMITTEE TESTIMONY FORM

SUBMITTED TO REFERENCE COMMITTEE: □ One    □ Two    □ Three

IN REGARD TO: □ Proposed Bylaws Amendment Number _____
          □ Proposed Policy Resolution Number _____

TESTIMONY: □ Agreement with proposed bylaw amendment or policy resolution
          □ Disagreement with proposed bylaw amendment or policy resolution

Please press hard and print your response to the following. Please keep the second copy of this form for your reference:

I PROPOSE THE FOLLOWING AMENDMENT (In reference to the proposed bylaws amendment, please identify page, article and section):

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

JUSTIFICATION (Succinctly state why you do or do not support the proposal):

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

PRINT NAME: ________________________ REPRESENTING: □ Society □ Self or □ BOT

I will provide testimony: □ Written Only □ Verbal & Written

The Reference Committee may wish to reach you to clarify your statement during their closed session. Please provide your cell phone number: ________________________
“Parade of Societies Flags” at the Opening of the House of Delegates

- To participate in the Parade of Societies your flag must be two feet by three feet (2’ X 3’) to fit on a 6-foot pole (see diagram below).
- Make sure you have a cord with the flag to hang on pole.
- To help with transporting the flag we will provide the flag pole and stand.
- At the beginning of January notify COA office that your Society will participate to ensure there is a pole and stand available for you.
- Contact Tamalon Littlefield 916-266-5028 or email her at Tamalon@coavision.org