# 71st General Service Conference Proposed Agenda Item by Area 29

***Motion: The Area 29 Committee recommends to the Area 29 Assembly that Area 29, Maryland adopts this agenda item to request a procedure be drafted to appeal a ruling by the Conference Chair. This procedure may include that the Chair may provide an explanation as to such ruling and the process for challenging a ruling of the Chair as defined in Robert's Rules of Order.***

# Key Points:

* Area 29 examined AA literature and legal documents that are germane to this particular issue: The Twelve Traditions, The Twelve Concepts, The Bylaws of the General Service Board, and the Conference Charter.
* Traditions 2 and 9 are relevant to the proposed agenda item. Tradition 9 talks about AA leadership being authorized by the top of the triangle, the AA groups. Our leaders are but trusted and experienced servants and derive no real authority from their titles. Universal respect is the key to their usefulness. Tradition 2 states that our leaders do not govern and that the ultimate authority is “a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience.”
* The Concepts provide a wealth of background which support the proposed agenda item. In reviewing them, Concepts II, III, IV, V, X, and Warranties 1, 3, 5 and 6 all have relevance to the issue. Central to the issue, are Concept 5 and Warranty 3. Concept 5 ensures a “right of appeal” for the Conference, and Warranty 3 reminds us that no Conference member shall be placed in a position of unqualified authority over any of the others. The purpose of the proposed agenda item is to preserve and protect this right of appeal as well as to clarify the role of the Chair at Conference.
* The Bylaws reinforce that the guiding principles of the General Service Board are the Twelve Traditions, and that members of the Board, are during conference, referred to as “Conference Delegates”, with the same rights and responsibilities as each Delegate.
* The Conference Charter reinforces the proper role of the Conference, not becoming a seat of perilous wealth or power.
* The Conference operates under a modified Roberts Rules of Order and Roberts Rules has a process for an appeal for a ruling of the Chair.

These spiritual principles and practical guides will enable the Conference to build on the

history of those Delegates that have gone before as well providing tools for future Conferences

**Relevant Details:**

Tradition 2 states that our leaders do not govern and that the ultimate authority is “a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience” expressed through the voice of the AA Group. Any leader who has unchecked authority – whose decisions may not be appealed – clearly “governs” in a strong way.

Concept V guarantees all Conference members the Right of Appeal, which may require a specified process. Bill W. wrote about Concept V,

Fortunately, we are not obliged to maintain a government that enforces conformity by inflicting punishments. We need to maintain only a structure of service that holds aloft the Traditions, that forms and executes our policies thereunder, and so steadily carries our message to those who suffer.

Hence we believe that we shall never be subjected to the tyranny of either the majority or the minority, provided we carefully define the relations between them and forthwith tread the path of world service in the spirit of our Twelve Steps, our Twelve Traditions, and our Conference Charter - in which I trust we shall one day inscribe these traditional Rights of ‘Appeal’ and ‘Petition.’[[1]](#footnote-1)

Because “problem, consternation, prayer and reflection, discussion and discernment, and [present] action” have happened in this case, a specified process is indeed needed now – otherwise the issue would not have come up. What kind of process can be developed that both protects the authority of the Chair to run an effective meeting, yet ensures the “Right of Appeal” when a legitimate appeal of a ruling of the Chair is deemed necessary?

Concept VII reminds us “…AA’s General Service Conference is clothed with such great tradition influence and financial power that, if necessary, it could overcome the legal rights of the Board of Trustees. It can therefore give the Trustees directives and secure compliance with them-practically speaking”[[2]](#footnote-2) and further “As the conscience of AA, the Delegates would find themselves in ultimate authority over our General Service Board and also its corporate arms of active world service.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

Warranty Threestates that “None of the Conference members shall ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over any of the others.” Bill cites the importance of this principle by writing,

We have learned that this principle is of incalculable value to the harmonious conduct of our Conference affairs…our world servants, both as individuals and as groups, shall be entitled to voting rights in reasonable proportion to their several responsibilities.

Because this right of participation is so important, we have made it the subject of this Warranty, thus providing insurance that Conference action alone can never overturn or amend this right…

The voting rights urged under our concept of ‘Participation’ are simply the practical means of checking any future tendency to an unqualified authority of any sort.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The Chair is still a member of the Conference and as such does not have unqualified authority over others. When it is perceived that the Chair has exercised such authority, it is incumbent a clear process be established to protect this Warranty.

In examining the Bylaws of the General Service Board, we see the proper functions, from where the authority derives, that guides decisions and the awesome responsibility of being the Guardians of the Twelve Traditions.

“The General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous, Inc., now has but one purpose, that of serving the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

“Members of the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous are hereinafter referred to as “Conference delegates.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

“The General Service Board in its deliberations and decisions shall be guided by the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous, hereinafter referred to as the ‘Traditions’”[[7]](#footnote-7)

“The General Service Board shall use its best efforts to insure that these Twelve Traditions are maintained, for it is regarded by the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous as the custodian of these Traditions and, accordingly, it shall not itself nor, so far as it is within the power so to do, permit others to modify, alter, or amplify these Traditions, except in keeping with the provisions of the Charter.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

The Conference Charter speaks of the Conference relation to the whole of A.A. and the importance of the Delegate vote. “The Conference will act for A.A. in the perpetuation

and guidance of its world services, and it will also be the vehicle by which the A.A. movement can express its view upon all matters of vital A.A. policy and all hazardous deviations from A.A. Tradition. Delegates should be free to vote as their conscience dictates; they should also be free to decide what questions should be taken to the group level, whether for information, discussion, or their own direct instruction.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

The Charter cautions the Conference to always be mindful of the spirit of A.A. Tradition ”In all its proceedings, the General Service Conference shall observe the spirit of the A.A. Tradition, taking great care that the Conference never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds, plus an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle; that none of the Conference members shall ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over any of the others; that all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote, and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy; that though the Conference may act for the service of Alcoholics Anonymous, it shall never perform any acts of government; and that, like the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous which it serves, the Conference itself will always remain democratic in thought and action.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

Robert’s Rules of Order speaks to this Issue. The “motion to appeal” is one of the lesser known motions in Robert’s Rules of Order. All of us are very familiar with the role of the Chair of the meeting. Under Robert’s Rules of Order, the Chair has the duty of keeping things on track. The Chair is responsible for announcing each item of business, recognizing speakers, and for protecting the group from wasting its time.

It is important to remember as well that the Chair is subject to the authority of the whole group. If the Chair says that a given subject is not relevant to the discussion or refuses to recognize someone who is entitled to speak, any two members can appeal. When that happens, the group makes the decision.

 It keeps the power in the hands of the group and ensures that the Chair of the meeting always serves the group’s wishes. It is basic to our democratic process. The appeal process is spelled out clearly where any two members have the right to appeal, one member making the appeal and the other seconding, the question is then taken from the Chair and vested in the assembly for final decision.

In sum: an appeal from the ruling of the Chair:

Can interrupt a speaker who has the floor.

Needs to be seconded Is debatable unless the immediately pending question is not debatable.

Can’t be amended.

Requires a majority vote to overturn the decision of the Chair.

Can be reconsidered.[[11]](#footnote-11)

**Conclusion:**

Area 29 believes that a procedure for appealing a ruling of the Chair at Conference would provide a process to assist the Chair when situations arise that the Chair may makes a ruling. How should that be handled? What is the process involved? What rights do the conference members have? What rights does the Chair have?

We believe this proposal to be a healthy one. A.A. history often evolves through a process leading from a problem, to consternation, to prayer and reflection, to discussion and discernment, and finally to action. For example, our Traditions are based upon the fellowships experience, good and bad, over the early years (ten or so) of AA’s existence. Experience both good and bad remains beneficial to the Fellowship after 85 years of existence, providing we use it to improve our procedures and to bring them more in line with our principles.

Finally, Bill reminds us in Warranty Six,

We expect that our Conference will always try to act in the spirit of mutual respect and love – one member for Another. in turn, this sign signifies that mutual trust should prevail; that no action ought to be taken in anger, haste or recklessness: that care will be observed to respect and protect all minorities; that no action should ever be personally punitive; ….that our Conference will ever be prudently on guard against tyrannies, great or small, whether these be found in the majority or the minority.[[12]](#footnote-12)

1. The AA Service Manual – Combined with “TWELVE CONCEPTS FOR WORLD SERVICE” © 2018-20 edition Concept 5, pp 22, 23 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Concept 7 p 27 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Concept 12 Warranty 3, p. 66 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Service Manual S114 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Service Manual S115 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Service Manual S116 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Service Manual S105 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Service Manual S108, 109 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised 11th Edition §24 Appeal pp 255-260 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Concept 12 Warranty 6, p, 72 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)