

**CHAPTER 3****RULES OF CONSTRUCTION****§71. Laws**

The following rules shall be observed in the construction of statutes, unless such construction is inconsistent with the plain meaning of the enactment.

**1. Acts by agents.** When an act that may be lawfully done by an agent is done by one authorized to do it, the agent's principal may be regarded as having done it.

[RR 2023, c. 1, Pt. C, §4 (COR).]

**2. And; or.** The words "and" and "or" are convertible as the sense of a statute may require.

**3. Authority to 3 or more.** Words in any statute, charter or ordinance giving authority to 3 or more persons authorize a majority to act when the statute, charter or ordinance does not otherwise specify. Notwithstanding any law to the contrary, a vacancy on an elected or appointed body does not in itself impair the authority of the remaining members to act unless a statute, charter or ordinance expressly prohibits the body from acting during the period of any vacancy and does not in itself affect the validity of any action no matter when taken.

[PL 2007, c. 396, §1 (RPR); PL 2007, c. 396, §4 (AFF).]

**4. Corporations.** Acts of incorporation shall be regarded in legal proceedings as public Acts. All special Acts of incorporation become null and void in 2 years from the day when the same take effect, unless such corporations shall have organized and commenced actual business under their charters.

[PL 1971, c. 439, §2 (RPR).]

**5. Dates.** Wherever in the Revised Statutes or any legislative Act a reference is made to several dates and the dates given in the reference are connected by the word "to", the reference includes both the dates which are given and all intervening dates.

**6. Disqualification.** When a person is required to be disinterested or indifferent in a matter in which others are interested, a relationship by consanguinity or affinity within the 6th degree according to the civil law, or within the degree of 2nd cousins inclusive, except by written consent of the parties, will disqualify.

**7. Gender.**

[PL 1987, c. 705, §1 (RP).]

**7-A. Gender.** In the construction of statutes, gender-neutral construction shall be applied as provided in this subsection.

A. Whenever reasonable, as determined by the Revisor of Statutes, nouns rather than pronouns shall be used to refer to persons in order to avoid gender identification. [PL 1987, c. 705, §2 (NEW).]

B. In preparing any legislation which amends a section or larger division of statutes, the Revisor of Statutes shall be authorized to change any masculine or feminine gender word to a gender-neutral word when it is clear that the statute is not exclusively applicable to members of one sex. The Revisor of Statutes shall not otherwise alter the sense, meaning or effect of any statute. [PL 1987, c. 861, §§1, 3 (AMD).]

C. The rule of construction concerning gender on the effective date of an Act or resolve shall apply to that Act or resolve. [PL 1987, c. 861, §§2, 3 (NEW).]

[PL 1987, c. 861, §§1-3 (AMD).]

**8. Severability.** The provisions of the statutes are severable. The provisions of any session law are severable. If any provision of the statutes or of a session law is invalid, or if the application of either to any person or circumstance is invalid, such invalidity does not affect other provisions or applications which can be given effect without the invalid provision or application. The repeal of a severability clause located in and applicable to any title or a division of a title, chapter, section or Act, must be construed as the removal of surplus language unless the law indicates otherwise.

[PL 1991, c. 332, §1 (AMD).]

**9. Singular and plural.** Words of the singular number may include the plural; and words of the plural number may include the singular.

**9-A. Shall; must; may.** "Shall" and "must" are terms of equal weight that indicate a mandatory duty, action or requirement. "May" indicates authorization or permission to act. This subsection applies to laws enacted or language changed by amendment after December 1, 1989.

[PL 1991, c. 332, §2 (NEW).]

**10. Statute Titles.** Abstracts of Titles, chapters and sections, and notes are not legal provisions.

**11. Statutory references.** Wherever in the Revised Statutes the word "Title" or "chapter" or "subchapter" appears without definite reference, it refers to the Title or chapter or subchapter in which the word "Title" or "chapter" or "subchapter" appears; if the chapter or subchapter is given a number without reference to a numbered Title, it refers to the chapter or subchapter of the Title in which the numbered chapter or subchapter appears. Wherever in the Revised Statutes a numbered section appears without reference to a numbered Title, it refers to the section of the Title in which the numbered section appears.

Wherever in the Revised Statutes or any legislative Act a reference is made to several sections, subsections, paragraphs, subparagraphs, divisions, subdivisions or sentences, the section, subsection, paragraph, subparagraph, division, subdivision or sentence numbers given in the reference are connected by the word "to," the reference includes both the sections, subsections, paragraphs, subparagraphs, divisions, subdivisions or sentences whose numbers are given and all intervening sections, subsections, paragraphs, subparagraphs, divisions, subdivisions and sentences.

Wherever in the Revised Statutes the designation of a division of the statutes larger than a section is numbered with the use of a Roman numeral, it may be known and cited by its Arabic equivalent.

[PL 2001, c. 710, §1 (AMD).]

**12. Statutory time periods.** The statutory time period for the performance or occurrence of any act, event or default that is a prerequisite to or is otherwise involved in or related to the commencement, prosecution or defense of any civil or criminal action or other judicial proceeding or any action or proceeding of the Public Utilities Commission is governed by and computed under Rule 6(a) of the Maine Rules of Civil Procedure as amended from time to time, when the nature of such action or proceeding is civil, and under Rule 45(a) of the Maine Rules of Unified Criminal Procedure, as amended from time to time, when the nature of such action or proceeding is criminal.

[PL 2015, c. 431, §1 (AMD).]

**13. Reporting dates.** If legislation or another legislative instrument requires a report to be filed by a date certain, and the date certain falls on a Saturday, Sunday or legal holiday, the report is due by close of business on the next day that is not a Saturday, Sunday or legal holiday.

[PL 2001, c. 471, Pt. D, §1 (NEW).]

#### SECTION HISTORY

PL 1971, c. 439, §2 (AMD). PL 1973, c. 85 (AMD). PL 1973, c. 788, §1 (AMD). PL 1983, c. 606 (AMD). PL 1985, c. 737, §C1 (AMD). PL 1987, c. 705, §§1,2 (AMD). PL 1987, c. 861, §§1-3 (AMD). PL 1991, c. 332, §§1,2 (AMD). PL 2001, c. 471, §D1 (AMD). PL 2001, c. 710,

§1 (AMD). PL 2007, c. 396, §1 (AMD). PL 2007, c. 396, §4 (AFF). PL 2015, c. 431, §1 (AMD). RR 2023, c. 1, Pt. C, §4 (COR).

## §72. Words and phrases

The following rules shall be observed in the construction of statutes relating to words and phrases, unless such construction is inconsistent with the plain meaning of the enactment, the context otherwise requires or definitions otherwise provide. [PL 1969, c. 433, §1 (RPR).]

**1. Adult.** "Adult" means a person who has attained the age of 18 years.  
[PL 1971, c. 598, §1 (AMD).]

**1-A. Affirmations.** When a person required to be sworn is conscientiously scrupulous of taking an oath, that person may affirm.  
[RR 2023, c. 1, Pt. C, §5 (COR).]

**2. Annual meeting.** "Annual meeting," applied to towns, means the annual meeting required by law for choice of town officers.

**2-A. Child or children.** "Child or children" means a person who has not attained the age of 18 years.  
[PL 1971, c. 598, §2 (AMD).]

**2-B. Full age.** "Full age" means the age of 18 and over.  
[PL 1971, c. 598, §2 (AMD).]

**2-C. Domestic partner.** "Domestic partner" means one of 2 unmarried adults who are domiciled together under long-term arrangements that evidence a commitment to remain responsible indefinitely for each other's welfare.  
[PL 2021, c. 567, §1 (NEW).]

**3. General rule.** Words and phrases shall be construed according to the common meaning of the language. Technical words and phrases and such as have a peculiar meaning convey such technical or peculiar meaning.

**4. Grantee.** "Grantee" means the person to whom a freehold estate or interest in land is conveyed.

**5. Grantor.** "Grantor" means the person who conveys a freehold estate or interest in land.

**6. Highway.** "Highway" may include a county bridge, county road or county way.

**6-A. Infant.** "Infant" means a person who has not attained the age of 18 years.  
[PL 1971, c. 598, §3 (AMD).]

**7. Inhabitant.** "Inhabitant" means a person having an established residence in a place.

**8. Insane person.**  
[PL 1977, c. 266 (RP).]

**9. Issue.** "Issue," applied to the descent of estates, includes all lawful lineal descendants of the ancestor.

**10. Land or lands.** "Land" or "lands" includes lands and all tenements and hereditaments connected therewith, and all rights thereto and interests therein.  
[RR 2013, c. 2, §1 (COR).]

**10-A. Lawful age.** "Lawful age" means the age of 18 and over.  
[PL 1971, c. 598, §4 (AMD).]

**10-B. Legal age.** "Legal age" means the age of 18 and over.  
[PL 1971, c. 598, §4 (AMD).]

**11. Majority.** "Majority" when used in reference to age shall mean the age of 18 and over.

[PL 1971, c. 598, §5 (AMD).]

**11-A. Minor or minors.** "Minor or minors" means any person who has not attained the age of 18 years.

[PL 1971, c. 598, §6 (AMD).]

**11-B. Minority.** "Minority" when used in reference to age shall mean under the age of 18.

[PL 1971, c. 598, §6 (AMD).]

**11-C. Month.** "Month" means a calendar month.

[PL 1969, c. 433, §6 (RPR).]

**12. Municipal officers.** "Municipal officers" means the mayor and municipal officers or councilors of a city, the members of the select board or councilors of a town and the assessors of a plantation.

[RR 2023, c. 1, Pt. C, §6 (COR).]

**13. Municipality.** "Municipality" includes cities, towns and plantations, except that "municipality" does not include plantations in Title 10, chapter 110, subchapter IV; or Title 30-A, Part 2.

[PL 1987, c. 737, Pt. C, §§1, 106 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 6 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 9, §2 (AMD); PL 1989, c. 104, Pt. C, §§8, 10 (AMD).]

**14. Oath.** "Oath" includes an affirmation, when affirmation is allowed.

**15. Person.** "Person" may include a body corporate.

**16. Pledge; mortgage, etc.** The terms "pledge," "mortgage," "conditional sale," "lien," "assignment" and like terms, when used in referring to a security interest in personal property shall include a corresponding security interest under Title 11, the Uniform Commercial Code.

**17. Real estate.** "Real estate" includes lands and all tenements and hereditaments connected therewith, and all rights thereto and interests therein.

**17-A. Registered apprenticeship.** "Registered apprenticeship" means an apprenticeship program registered with the Maine Apprenticeship Program in accordance with Title 26, chapter 37.

[PL 2011, c. 491, §1 (AMD).]

**18. Registered mail.** The words "registered mail" when used in connection with any requirement for notice by mail shall mean either registered mail or certified mail.

**19. Seal, corporate.** Whenever a corporate seal is used or required on any instrument, an impression made on the paper of such instrument by the seal of the corporation, without any adhesive substance, shall be deemed a valid seal. A seal of a corporation upon a certificate of stock, corporate bond or other corporate obligation for the payment of money may be facsimile, engraved or printed.

[PL 1971, c. 439, §3 (AMD).]

**20. Seal, court.** When the seal of a court, magistrate or public officer is to be affixed to a paper, the word "seal" may mean an impression made on the paper for that purpose with or without wafer or wax.

**21. State.** "State," used with reference to any organized portion of the United States, may mean a territory or the District of Columbia.

[PL 1965, c. 513, §1 (AMD).]

**22. State paper.** "State paper" means the newspaper designated by the Legislature, in which advertisements and notices are required to be published.

[PL 1973, c. 625, §1 (AMD).]

**23. Sworn.** "Sworn," "duly sworn" or "sworn according to law," used in a statute, record or certificate of administration of an oath, refers to the oath required by the Constitution or laws in the case specified, and includes every necessary subscription to such oath.  
[RR 2013, c. 2, §2 (COR).]

**24. Timber and grass.** "Timber and grass," when used in reference to the public reserved lots, so called, in unorganized territory in the State, means all growth of every description on said lots.  
[RR 2013, c. 2, §2 (COR).]

**25. Town.** "Town" includes cities and plantations, unless otherwise expressed or implied.

**26. Under age.** "Under age" means under the age of 18.  
[PL 1971, c. 598, §7 (AMD).]

**26-A. United States.** "United States" includes territories and the District of Columbia.  
[PL 1969, c. 433, §7 (RPR).]

**26-B. Unsealed instruments, when given effect of sealed instruments in any written instrument.** A recital that such instrument is sealed by or bears the seal of the person signing the same or is given under the hand and seal of the person signing the same, or that such instrument is intended to take effect as a sealed instrument, shall be sufficient to give such instrument the legal effect of a sealed instrument without the addition of any seal of wax, paper or other substance or any semblance of a seal by scroll, impression or otherwise; but the foregoing shall not apply in any case where the seal of a court, public office or public officer is expressly required by the Constitution, by statute or by rule of the court to be affixed to a paper, nor shall it apply in the case of certificates of stock of corporations. The word "person" as used in this subsection shall include a corporation, association, trust or partnership.  
[PL 1969, c. 590, §2 (NEW).]

**27. Vacant and vacancy.** "Vacant" and "vacancy" as applied to public office shall comprise and include all cases where the person elected or appointed to such office resigns therefrom or dies while holding the same or, being elected or appointed, is ineligible, dies or becomes incapacitated before qualifying as required by law.

**28. Written and in writing.** "Written" and "in writing" include printing and other modes of making legible words. When the signature of a person is required, that person must write it or make that person's mark, but the signatures upon all commissions or the signatures on interest coupons annexed to a corporate bond or other corporate obligation may be facsimiles, engraved or printed. The signatures of any officer or officers of a corporation upon a corporate bond or other corporate obligation, other than interest coupons, may be facsimiles, engraved or printed, on condition that such bond or obligation is signed or certified by a trustee, registrar or transfer agent. In case any officer who has signed or whose facsimile signature has been placed upon such corporate bond, other corporate obligation or interest coupon has ceased to be an officer before such corporate bond or other corporate obligation is issued, it may be issued by the corporation with the same effect as if that person were an officer at the date of its issue.  
[RR 2023, c. 1, Pt. C, §7 (COR).]

**29. Will.** "Will" includes a codicil.

**30. Year.** "Year" means a calendar year, unless otherwise expressed. "Year," used for a date, means year of our Lord.

#### SECTION HISTORY

PL 1965, c. 513, §1 (AMD). PL 1969, c. 113 (AMD). PL 1969, c. 433, §§1-7 (AMD). PL 1969, c. 590, §§1,2 (AMD). PL 1971, c. 439, §§3,4 (AMD). PL 1971, c. 598, §§1-7 (AMD). PL 1973, c. 625, §1 (AMD). PL 1973, c. 628, §1 (AMD). PL 1975, c. 770, §1 (AMD). PL 1975, c. 777,

§1 (AMD). PL 1977, c. 266 (AMD). PL 1977, c. 390, §1 (AMD). PL 1977, c. 479, §1 (AMD). PL 1981, c. 698, §1 (AMD). PL 1987, c. 737, §§C1,C106 (AMD). PL 1989, c. 6 (AMD). PL 1989, c. 9, §2 (AMD). PL 1989, c. 104, §§C8,C10 (AMD). PL 1993, c. 630, §B1 (AMD). PL 2011, c. 491, §1 (AMD). RR 2013, c. 2, §§1, 2 (COR). PL 2021, c. 275, §1 (AMD). PL 2021, c. 567, §1 (AMD). RR 2023, c. 1, Pt. C, §§5-7 (COR).

### §73. Majority

The common law rule that a person is a minor to the age of 20 is abrogated and persons 18 years of age or over are declared to be of majority for all purposes. [PL 1971, c. 598, §8 (AMD).]

#### SECTION HISTORY

PL 1969, c. 433, §8 (NEW). PL 1971, c. 598, §8 (AMD).

### §74. Revision authorized

The following revisions to the laws of Maine are authorized: [PL 1977, c. 78, §1 (NEW).]

**1. References to Executive Council in public laws.** Notwithstanding any other provision of law, after January 4, 1977, wherever in any public law, whether allocated to the Maine Revised Statutes or not, the words "Executive Council" and "council" used as an abbreviation for Executive Council, or any other reference to the Executive Council appear, the public laws shall read as if those words were not contained in that public law. This section shall not affect any application of any public law prior to January 4, 1977. The Revisor of Statutes may assist any republication of any public law after January 4, 1977, to ensure deletion of any reference in that public law to the Executive Council. [PL 1985, c. 737, Pt. B, §1 (AMD).]

**2. References to Executive Council in private and special laws.** Notwithstanding any other provision of law, after January 4, 1977, wherever in any private and special law the words "Executive Council" and "council" used as an abbreviation for Executive Council, or any other reference to the Executive Council appear the private and special law shall read as if those words were not contained in that law. This section shall not affect any application of any private and special law prior to January 4, 1977. The Revisor of Statutes may assist any republication of any private and special law after January 4, 1977, to ensure deletion of any reference to the Executive Council. [PL 1985, c. 737, Pt. B, §1 (AMD).]

#### SECTION HISTORY

PL 1977, c. 78, §1 (NEW). PL 1985, c. 737, §B1 (AMD).

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