

BELIZE:

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (POWERS, PRIVILEGES AND
IMMUNITIES) BILL, 2025**

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BILL**For**

AN ACT to repeal and replace the Legislative Assembly (Powers and Privileges) Act; to declare and define certain powers, privileges and immunities of the National Assembly and of the members and officers of such Assembly; to secure freedom of speech in the National Assembly; to regulate admittance to the precincts of the National Assembly; to give protection to the persons employed in the publication of the reports and other papers of the National Assembly; to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

(Gazetted, 2025)

BE IT ENACTED, by and with the advice and consent of the House of Representatives and Senate of Belize and by the authority of the same, as follows:

PART I*Preliminary*

Short title.

1. This Act may be cited as the

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (POWERS, PRIVILEGES AND
IMMUNITIES) BILL, 2025.**

Interpretation.

2. In this Act—

“chamber” means the Senate or the House;

“Clerk” means the Clerk of the National Assembly;

“committee” means any select, sessional, special, standing or other committee of either chamber or joint committee;

“electronic means” means e-mail and any other means of communication by electronic medium as specified by the Speaker or President, as the case may be;

“House” means the House of Representatives provided for under the Constitution;

“joint committee” means any committee composed of members of both chambers appointed by corresponding orders of both chambers;

“meeting” means any sitting of a chamber commencing when the chamber first meets after being summoned at any time and terminating when the chamber is adjourned *sine die* or at the conclusion of a session;

“member” means a member of either chamber and, in relation to the House, includes the Speaker;

“officer of the chamber” means any person who may from time to time be appointed to the staff of either chamber, whether permanently or temporarily, and includes the Clerk and any police officer on duty within the precincts of either chamber;

“precincts of the chamber” means, while a chamber or a committee of a chamber is sitting, all the offices, rooms and galleries of the chamber and the places provided for the use or accommodation of members of the public and representatives of the press;

“President” means the President of the Senate and includes any member for the time being presiding over the Senate;

“Senate” means the Senate provided for under the Constitution;

“session” shall have the same meaning as that assigned to it in section 131(1) of the Belize Constitution; CAP. 4.

“sitting” shall have the same meaning as that assigned to it in section 131(1) of the Belize Constitution; CAP. 4.

“Speaker” means the Speaker of the House and includes the deputy Speaker and any member for the time being presiding over the House;

“Standing Orders” means the Standing Orders of either chamber made under section 70 of the Belize Constitution, and for the time being in force; CAP. 4.

“stranger” means, in relation to a chamber, any person other than a member or an officer of that chamber.

PART II

Immunities

3. Neither the President, nor the Speaker, nor an officer of the chamber shall be subject to the jurisdiction of any court in respect of the lawful exercise of a power conferred on or vested in the President, the Speaker or such officer by or under the Constitution, this Act or any order of either chamber.

President,
Speaker and
officers not
subject to
jurisdiction of
courts.

Immunity from
legal
proceedings.

4. No civil or criminal proceedings may be instituted against a member—

- (a) in respect of words spoken before;
- (b) in respect of words written in a report to;
- (c) by reason of any matter or thing brought by petition, bill, motion or otherwise, before,

the chamber to which the member belongs or a committee thereof, or a joint committee.

Immunity from
arrest.

5.—(1) No member shall, during a session, be liable to arrest or imprisonment on any civil process, except for a debt which constitutes a criminal offence.

(2) When a member is—

- (a) arrested or detained in custody upon the warrant or order of a court; or
- (b) sentenced by a court to a term of imprisonment,

the court shall, as soon as practicable, inform the President or the Speaker, as the case may be.

Immunity of
persons acting
under authority
of either
chamber.

6. No person shall be liable for an act done under the authority of either chamber and within its legal powers or under a warrant issued by virtue of those powers.

Restriction on
service of
process.

7. Notwithstanding anything contained in any written law to the contrary, no process issued by a court in the exercise of its civil jurisdiction shall be served or executed within the precincts of either chamber while the chamber is sitting or through the President, the Speaker, or any officer of the chamber.

8.—(1) It shall not be lawful to require a member or an officer of the chamber to serve on a jury or as an assessor in any court.

Member or officer not to serve on jury, etc.

(2) It shall not be lawful to require a member or an officer of the chamber to attend as a witness in any civil proceedings in a court or at any commission of inquiry or before any like authority empowered to summon witnesses—

(a) during a sitting of the chamber of which that person is a member;

(b) on any day on which there is the sitting of a committee of which that person is a member or which that person is required to attend as such officer.

(3) The production of a certificate signed by the President, or the Speaker, as the case may be, shall be deemed sufficient proof of attendance on the Senate, or the House, respectively.

PART III

Summoning and Examination of Witnesses

9.—(1) Either chamber, or a committee authorised by an order of the chamber by which it was appointed, or a joint committee authorised by an order of each chamber, to send for persons, papers and records, may order a person—

Chambers or committee may order attendance of witnesses.

(a) to attend before it and to give evidence; or

(b) to attend before it and produce any paper, book, record or other document in the possession or under the control of such person.

(2) In this section, “order of the chamber” includes the Standing Orders of that chamber.

10.—(1) An order under section 9 shall be notified to the person required to attend by a summons under the hand of the Clerk, or the chairperson of the committee, as the case may be.

Service of summons.

(2) In every summons issued in accordance with the sub-section (1) there shall be stated the time when, and the place where, the person summoned is required to attend and the document which that person is required to produce.

(3) Every such summons may be served by—

- (a) delivering it to the person to whom it is directed;
- (b) electronic means to the person to whom it is directed; or
- (c) if personal service or service by electronic means cannot be effected, by forwarding the summons by registered post addressed to the person to whom it is directed at his last known place of abode or business.

(4) A summons issued in accordance with this section may be served—

- (a) when issued from a chamber, by an officer of that chamber;
- (b) when issued from a committee, by an officer of the chamber by which the committee was appointed; or
- (c) by a police officer.

(5) There shall be paid or tendered to any person summoned under this section, if that person does not reside within four miles of the place of attendance specified in the summons, such sum for his expenses as may be authorised by order of the chamber concerned.

Proof of service.

11.—(1) The service of a summons shall be proved by an affidavit sworn by the person who issued the summons under section 10(4).

(2) The affidavit shall—

- (a) in the case of personal service, state—
 - (i) the date and time of service;
 - (ii) the precise place or address at which it was served;
 - (iii) the precise manner by which the person on whom the summons was served was identified; and
 - (iv) precisely how the summons was served;
- (b) in the case of service by electronic means—
 - (i) state the electronic means by which the summons was served;
 - (ii) state the e-mail address to which the document was transmitted;

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- (iii) state the date and time of the transmission;
 - (iv) exhibit a copy of the document served;
 - (v) exhibit any cover sheet to that document;
 - (vi) exhibit the transmission record; and
 - (vii) exhibit proof of electronic service of the document;
and
 - (c) in the case of service by registered post—
 - (i) state the date and time of posting;
 - (ii) state the address to which it was sent; and
 - (iii) exhibit the summons.
- (3) In the case of personal service—
- (a) if the person served was identified by another person, that person shall, where practicable, file an affidavit—
 - (i) proving the identification of the person served; and
 - (ii) stating how the maker of the affidavit was able to identify the person served; or
 - (b) if the server identified the person to be served by means of a photograph or description, that person also shall file an affidavit—
 - (i) verifying the description or photograph as being of the person intended to be served; and
 - (ii) stating how the maker of the affidavit is able to verify the description or photograph as being of the person intended to be served.
- (4) The electronic confirmation of delivery may be treated as proof of service of a document that is served by electronic means and may include a written e-mail response, a read receipt or an automated response that a summons was posted in an online shared drive.

Issue of warrant if person evades service of summons or refuses to attend.

12.—(1) If a person to whom a summons under section 10 is directed does not attend before the chamber or the committee at the time and place stated, the appropriate authority, upon being satisfied that the summons was duly served, or that the person to whom the summons is directed wilfully avoids service, may issue a warrant to apprehend that person and bring him at a time and place to be stated in the warrant, before the chamber or the committee.

(2) A warrant issued under this section shall be executed by a police officer.

(3) The appropriate authority, on issuing a warrant under this section, may, if he thinks fit, by ordering an appropriate endorsement on the warrant, direct that the person mentioned in the warrant be released after arrest upon his entering into such a recognisance as may be required in the endorsement before a court of summary jurisdiction, conditioned for his appearance before the chamber or the committee, as the case may be.

(4) For the purposes of this section the appropriate authority shall be—

- (a) in the case of a summons issued for the attendance of a person before either chamber or a committee thereof, other than a joint committee, the President or the Speaker, as the case may be; or
- (b) in the case of a summons issued for the attendance of a person before a joint committee, either the President or the Speaker.

Witnesses may be examined on oath.

13. Either chamber or any committee authorised to send for persons, papers and records may require that any facts, matters and things relating to the subject of inquiry before the chamber or such committee be verified or otherwise ascertained by the oral examination of witnesses, and may cause any such witnesses to be examined upon oath, which, in the case of either chamber, the Clerk, or in the case of a committee, the chairperson or Clerk attending the committee is hereby authorised to administer.

Recalcitrant witnesses.

14.—(1) If a witness attending before either chamber or a committee pursuant to a summons issued under section 10, or brought before a chamber or committee by virtue of a warrant issued under section 12, refuses to answer a question put by the chamber or committee, or to produce a paper, book, record, or other document, which that witness has been required to produce by an order made under section 9 and in the opinion of the President, the Speaker or the chairperson, as the case may be—

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- (a) such question, paper, book, record, or other document is material to the subject matter before the chamber or the committee; and
 - (b) no privilege exists in relation to such question, paper, book, record, or other document under section 15,

the President, Speaker or chairman, as the case may be, may refer such refusal to the High Court.

(2) The Registrar of the High Court shall fix a date for the consideration by the Court at the earliest opportunity of any reference made under this section, and shall cause notice of the date so fixed to be given to the Clerk, and to the witness.

(3) Upon consideration of a reference made under this section and—

- (a) upon proof by affidavit or otherwise of the relevant facts; and
- (b) after giving the witness an opportunity of showing cause why an order should not be made against him under this sub-section,

the High Court may make an order that the witness answer the question, or produce such paper, book, record, or other document, either forthwith or within such time as may be specified in the order.

(4) A person who fails, without lawful excuse, to comply with an order made under sub-section (3) commits a contempt of court and may be proceeded against and punished accordingly.

(5) Rules of court may be made by the authority having for the time being power to make rules or orders regulating the practice and procedure of the High Court for the purpose of regulating the practice and procedure relating to the consideration by the Court of references made under this section, and without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing provision, such rules may—

- (a) prescribe the matters required to be set forth in an affidavit made for the purpose of this section and the person who shall depose to the facts contained in the affidavit; or
- (b) prescribe the manner in which proof shall be given of the facts relevant to the subject matter of a reference made under this section.

PART IV

Privileges and Protection

Privileges of witnesses.

15.—(1) Every person summoned to attend to give evidence, or to produce any paper, book, record, or other document, before either chamber or a committee shall be entitled, in respect of such evidence or the disclosure of any communication or the production of any such paper, book, record or other document, to the same right or privilege as before the High Court.

(2) No public officer, except with the consent of the Governor-General, shall be required—

- (a) to produce before either chamber or a committee any paper, book, record or other document; or
- (b) to give before either chamber or a committee any evidence on any matter,

if such paper, book, record or other document or such evidence is stated by the public officer to form part of or to relate to the unpublished official records of any naval, military or air force or civil department, or to relate to any affairs of the State, nor shall evidence on such matter or of the contents of any such paper, book, record, or other document, be given by any other witness or in any other manner.

Evidence of witness before chamber or committee privileged.

16.—(1) Subject to sub-section (3), a person who gives evidence before either chamber or a committee shall not be liable to civil or criminal proceedings by reason of anything which that person may have said in such evidence.

(2) Except in proceedings referred to in sub-section (3), no statement made by a person in evidence given before either chamber or a committee shall be admissible in evidence against that person in civil or criminal proceedings.

(3) Nothing in the preceding provisions of this section shall be construed to prevent the institution or maintenance of proceedings against a person for an offence under section 22 or 23.

Evidence of proceedings.

17.—(1) Subject to sub-section (2), no evidence relating to—

- (a) debates or proceedings in either chamber;
- (b) the contents of the minutes of evidence taken or any document laid before either chamber or any document or

any proceedings of or before, or any examination had before, either chamber or a committee,

shall be admissible in any proceedings before a court or person authorised by law to take evidence.

(2) Evidence specified under sub-section (1) shall be admissible if the court or person authorised to take evidence is satisfied that permission has been given—

(a) in the case of either chamber or a committee, other than a joint committee, by the President or the Speaker, as the case may be; or

(ii) in the case of a joint committee, by either the President or the Speaker.

18. A person, being a defendant in civil or criminal proceedings instituted for or on account or in respect of the publication by such person or by his employee by order or under the authority of either chamber, of any report, paper, minutes, votes or proceedings, may, on giving to the plaintiff or prosecutor, as the case may be, twenty-four hours written notice of intention, bring before the court in which such civil or criminal proceedings are being held a certificate under the hand of the President, or the Speaker, as the case may be, or of the Clerk, stating that the reports, papers, minutes, votes or proceedings in respect whereof such civil or criminal proceedings have been instituted were published by such person or by his employee by order or under the authority of the chamber, with an affidavit verifying such certificate, and the court shall thereupon immediately stay the proceedings and the same and every process issued therein shall be deemed to be finally determined.

Protection of person responsible for publications authorised by chamber.

19. In any civil or criminal proceedings instituted for publishing any extract from or abstract of any report, paper, minutes, votes or proceedings, or for publishing any such extract or abstract contrary to the provisions of this Act, if the court or jury, as the case may be, is satisfied that such extract or abstract was published *bona fide* without malice, judgement shall be entered for the defendant, or the accused shall be acquitted, as the case may be.

Protection of persons publishing extracts from or abstracts of proceedings, etc., *bona fide*

20. Upon any inquiry touching the privileges, immunities and powers of either chamber or of a member, a copy of the minutes or proceedings of the chamber purporting to be printed by the Government Printer shall be admitted as evidence of such minutes or proceedings in all courts and places without proof required that such copy was so printed.

Proceedings, etc., printed by Government Printer admissible in evidence.

PART V

Offences by Witnesses

Witness failing to attend, or refusing to answer question or to produce documents, etc., guilty of an offence.

21. A person who—

- (a) fails without reasonable excuse, the proof whereof shall be upon him, to attend before either chamber or a committee when so required by an order made under the provisions of section 9; or
- (b) refuses to be examined before, or to answer any question put by, the chamber or a committee, or to produce any paper, book, record, or other document, which he or she has been required to produce by an order made under the provisions of section 9, unless such question, or paper, book, record or other document, is not, in the opinion of the President, the Speaker or the chairman of the committee, as the case may be, material to the subject matter before the chamber or committee or such refusal is allowed under the provisions of section 15,

commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of seven hundred and fifty dollars and to imprisonment for three months.

Making false statement to chamber or committee an offence.

22. A person who, in the course of giving evidence before either chamber or a committee, wilfully makes a statement material to the subject matter before the chamber or committee knowing the statement to be false or not believing it to be true, commits an offence and—

- (a) if the statement was made on oath, is liable on conviction on indictment to imprisonment for seven years and to a fine of ten thousand dollars;
- (b) if the statement was made otherwise than on oath, liable on conviction by a court of summary jurisdiction to a fine of three thousand dollars and to imprisonment for twelve months.

Presenting false document to chamber or committee an offence

23. A person who presents to either chamber or a committee any false, untrue, fabricated or falsified document with intent to deceive the chamber or committee commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of three thousand dollars and to imprisonment for twelve months.

PART VI

Offences by Strangers

24.—(1) No stranger shall be entitled to enter or remain within either chamber or the precincts of either chamber without permission duly granted under the authority of the President or the Speaker, as the case may be.

Restriction on right of stranger to enter either chamber.

(2) The President, in the case of the Senate, and the Speaker in the case of the House, may at any time order a stranger to withdraw from the chamber or from the precincts of the chamber, and if that person fails to obey such order, that person may be forcibly removed from the chamber or from the precincts of the chamber by an officer of the chamber and no proceedings shall lie in any court against the President, or the Speaker (as the case may be) or against such officer, in respect of such removal.

(3) Nothing in this section shall be construed so as to prevent any member from going to or coming from the chamber or the precincts of the chamber of which that person is a member.

25. A stranger who—

Offences by strangers with respect to right of entry into chamber.

- (a) enters either chamber or the precincts of a chamber without permission duly granted under section 24(1) by the President or the Speaker, as the case may be, or being therein with such permission refuses to leave upon the order of the President or the Speaker, as the case may be;
- (b) being admitted to either chamber or to the precincts of a chamber, contravenes any rule made by the President or the Speaker, as the case may be, under the Standing Orders of the chamber in question relating to the admission of strangers; or
- (c) attends any sitting of either chamber as a representative of any journal after a general permission granted under the Standing Orders of that chamber to the representative or representatives of that journal has been revoked,

commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of one thousand dollars and to imprisonment for three months.

26. A stranger who—

Offences by strangers with respect to interference with members, or privileges of chamber.

- (a) assaults, hinders, obstructs or insults any member coming to, going from or being within the chamber or the precincts of the chamber to which the member belongs;
- (b) interferes with, resists or obstructs any officer of the chamber while in the execution of his or her duty; or

- (c) creates or joins in any disturbance which interrupts or is liable to interrupt the proceedings of either chamber while it is sitting,

commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of five thousand dollars and to imprisonment for two years.

Arrest of
stranger
committing
offence against
section 25 or 26.

27.—(1) An officer of the chamber may, without an order from a court and without a warrant, arrest—

- (a) a stranger who commits, in relation to the chamber of which he is an officer, an offence contrary to section 25 or 26 in his presence;
- (b) a stranger within the chamber or the precincts of the chamber of which he is an officer whom he reasonably suspects of having committed an offence contrary to either of the said sections.

(2) A stranger arrested under the provisions of this section may be kept in custody within the precincts of the chamber until the President or the Speaker, as the case may be, orders his release to a police officer, but that person shall not be kept in custody after the termination of the sitting of the chamber during which that person was arrested.

PART VII

Conduct of Members

28.—(1) A member who—

Acts constituting
contempt by
member,
suspension, etc.

- (a) being a member of a committee, publishes without authority of the committee, to any person not being a member of the chamber or chambers by which the committee was appointed, any evidence taken by the committee before it has been reported to that chamber or both chambers, as the case may be;
- (b) assaults or obstructs an officer of the chamber to which he belongs while in the execution of his duty; or
- (c) is convicted of an offence under this Act,

commits contempt of the chamber to which that member belongs.

(2) Where a member commits contempt under sub-section (1), the chamber may order the member to be reprimanded by the President or the

Speaker, as the case may be, or suspend that member from the service of the chamber for such period as it may determine,

Provided that such period shall not extend beyond the last day of the meeting next following that in which the order is made, or of the session in which the order is made, whichever shall first occur.

(3) No salary or allowance payable to a member for his service as such shall be paid in respect of any period during which that member is suspended under the provisions of this Act from the service of the chamber to which that member belongs.

(4) Nothing in this section shall be construed so as to preclude the bringing of civil or criminal proceedings against a member in respect of any assault or obstruction punishable under sub-section (1).

29.—(1) A member shall not in or before the chamber to which he belongs take part in the discussion of any matter in which he has a direct pecuniary interest without disclosing the extent of that interest.

Member to disclose interest in matter for discussion.

(2) A member who contravenes sub-section (1) commits contempt of the chamber and is be liable to the penalties provided for in section 28.

30. A member who has been suspended from the service of the chamber to which he belongs shall not enter or remain within the chamber or the precincts of the chamber while such suspension remains in force, and if such a member is found within the chamber or the precincts of the chamber in contravention of this section, that member may be forcibly removed therefrom by an officer of the chamber and no proceedings shall lie in any court against such officer in respect of the removal.

Suspended member excluded from chamber.

31. A member who accepts or obtains or attempts to obtain for himself or for any other person any bribe, fee, compensation, gift, reward or benefit of any kind for speaking, voting or acting as a member, or on account of his or her having so spoken, voted or acted, or on account of his having refrained from so speaking, voting or acting, commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of five thousand dollars and to imprisonment for two years and, in addition, that member shall forfeit the amount of the value of any bribe, fee, compensation, gift, reward or benefit accepted or received by him.

Member seeking or accepting bribe, etc., commits offence.

PART VIII

Other Offences

Bribery of,
violence or
threats to,
member.

32. A person who—

- (a) offers to a member any bribe, fee, compensation, gift, reward or benefit of any kind for speaking, voting or acting as a member, or for refraining from so speaking, voting or acting, or on account of his having so spoken, voted or acted or having so refrained; or
- (b) makes, or threatens to make, use of any force, violence or restraint or inflicts, or threatens to inflict, any temporal or spiritual injury, damage, harm or loss upon or against a member—
 - (i) with the intent thereby to influence such member in the manner in which he discharges his functions as a member in the chamber to which he belongs, or in any committee thereof; or
 - (ii) on account of the manner in which he has discharged his functions as a member in the chamber to which he belongs, or in any committee thereof,

commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of five thousand dollars and to imprisonment for two years.

Defamatory,
misleading or
prohibited
publications.

33.—(1) A person who publishes—

- (a) any statement, whether in writing or otherwise, which falsely or scandalously defames either chamber or a committee, or which reflects on the character of the President or the Speaker or the chairman of a committee in the discharge of his duty as such;
- (b) any writing containing a gross, wilful or scandalous misrepresentation of the proceedings of either chamber or a committee thereof or of the speech of a member in the proceedings of either chamber or a committee thereof;
- (c) any writing containing any false or scandalous libel on a member touching his conduct as a member;
- (d) to any person other than a member of the chamber by which a committee was appointed, or in the case of a joint committee, other than a member of either chamber, any report of the committee or of any evidence given before or any documents presented to the committee or any extract from such documents, before such committee has presented

its report, to the chamber or chambers by which the committee was appointed; or

- (e) any report or statements purporting to be a report of the proceedings of either chamber in any case—
 - (i) where such proceedings have been conducted after exclusion of the public by order of the chamber, or
 - (ii) where such publication has been expressly prohibited by order of the chamber,

commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of five thousand dollars and to imprisonment for twelve months.

(2) In this section, “publishes”, in relation to any writing, means exhibits in public or causes to be read or seen, or shows or delivers, or causes to be shown or delivered, with intent that the writing may be read or seen by any person.

34. A person who prints or causes to be printed a copy of any Act for the time being in force of the Legislature, or a copy of any report, paper, minutes or votes or proceedings of either chamber or a committee, purporting to have been printed by the Government Printer or by or under the authority of either chamber or by or under the authority of the President or the Speaker, and the same is not so printed, or shall tender in evidence any such copy purporting to be so printed knowing that the same was not so printed, commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of three thousand dollars and to imprisonment for twelve months.

Unauthorised
printing of Acts,
etc.

PART IX

Miscellaneous

35. The powers of the President and the Speaker under this Act shall be supplemental to any powers conferred on them by the Constitution or Standing Orders.

Powers of
President and
Speaker under
this Act to be
supplemental.

36. For the purposes of this Act, it shall be lawful for the person who fills the office of Speaker at the time of dissolution of the House to exercise all the powers conferred by this Act on the Speaker until the House is again summoned or until another person has been appointed in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

Speaker may act
notwithstanding
dissolution of
House.

No prosecution
without the
consent of the
Attorney-
General.

37.—(1) No prosecution for an offence under this Act shall be instituted—

(a) unless the matter giving rise to the prosecution has been reported to the Attorney-General, in the case of a matter relating to the Senate, by the President or, in the case of a matter relating to the House, by the Speaker; and

(b) by or on behalf of the Director of Public Prosecution.

(2) A certificate under the hand of the Attorney-General that the requirement of sub-section (1)(a) has been complied with shall be conclusive evidence of the fact of such compliance.

Repeal and
savings.

38.—(1) The Legislative Assembly (Powers and Privileges) Ordinance, 1962 is repealed.

(2) Notwithstanding the repeal, nothing in this Act shall affect anything done or proceedings taken or a right which has accrued or a liability which has been incurred or any other thing done under the repealed Act.