



A Guide to Your General Assembly

and

How to Communicate Your Issue

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
(borrowed from the Connecticut General Assembly Website)

Connecticut's state legislature is known as the General Assembly. It consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives. In accordance with the Constitution adopted in 1965, senators and representatives are elected for two-year terms from single member districts of substantially equal population. The House and Senate meet at the State Capitol in Hartford. General Assembly committees meet and hold hearings in the adjoining Legislative Office Building.

SESSIONS

REGULAR SESSIONS

Odd-numbered years: Sessions begin on the Wednesday following the first Monday in January and adjourn not later than the first Wednesday following the first Monday in June.

Even-numbered years: Sessions begin on the Wednesday following the first Monday in February and adjourn not later than the first Wednesday following the first Monday in May. Even-numbered year sessions are limited to budgetary, revenue, and financial matters; bills and resolutions raised by General Assembly committees; and matters the speaker of the House of Representatives and president pro tempore of the Senate certify in writing as emergencies.

MEMBERSHIP

THE SENATE: The Senate has 36 members.

THE HOUSE: The House has 151 members.

TERM OF OFFICE: Two years.

ELECTED: In November of even-numbered years.

ANNUAL SALARY: \$28,000 plus \$5,500 expenses for senators and \$4,500 for representatives, plus a 55 cents-per-mile travel allowance.

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Leadership

THE SENATE

OFFICERS

President: By virtue of his/her office as lieutenant governor, presides over Senate; gives the casting vote if Senate is equally divided.

President Pro Tempore: Elected by Senate; presides over Senate in absence of lieutenant governor; appoints Senate chairmen and committee members.

Majority Leader: Elected by majority party members of Senate. In conjunction with the president pro tempore, manages the order of Senate business.

Minority Leader: Elected by minority party members of Senate. Nominates committee members and designates committee ranking members.

THE HOUSE

OFFICERS

Speaker: Elected by House of Representatives; presides over House; appoints House chairmen and committee members.

Majority Leader: Elected by majority party members of House. In conjunction with the speaker, manages the order of House business.

Republican Leader: Elected by minority party members of the House. Nominates minority committee members and designates committee ranking members.

ORGANIZATIONS AND PROCEDURES

At the beginning of each session, the Senate and House adopt separate rules for conducting business and joint rules governing committees and procedures for introducing and reporting bills. The General Assembly holds joint conventions to receive the governor's state of the state, budget, and adjournment messages; and conduct other necessary business.

COMMITTEES

All committees of the General Assembly are joint committees composed of both senators and representatives. For 2009-2010, there are 27 committees, 25 of which draft, review and report bills and resolutions. Three committees (Internship, Program Review and Investigations, and Regulation Review) have equal numbers of members from each political party and special responsibilities. Select committees consider particular issues and must report legislation to standing committees rather than directly to the House or Senate. Committees function regardless of whether the General Assembly is in session. Most occupy offices and use hearing rooms in the Legislative Office Building (LOB). The committees, their chairmen, and office locations are:

Aging (Select):
Appropriations
Banks
Children (Select)
Commerce
Education
Energy and Technology
Environment
Executive & Legislative Nominations
Finance, Revenue & Bonding
General Law
Government Administration & Elections
Higher Education and Employment Advancement
Housing
Human Services
Insurance and Real Estate
Internship
Judiciary
Labor and Public Employees
Legislative Management
Planning & Development
Program Review & Investigations
Public Health
Public Safety and Security
Regulation Review
Transportation Committee
Veterans' Affairs (Select)

HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

Proposed Bills

Before the session opens, and for a limited time after opening day, General Assembly members may file proposed bills and resolutions in the house to which they were elected. Proposals may reflect legislators' special concerns or be introduced at the request of constituents, organizations, executive department heads, or other government agencies. Proposed bills are not written in full statutory language but instead state their purpose briefly in plain language. Bills drafted in formal statutory language may be introduced only by committees or by the leaders of the governor's party in the General Assembly at the governor's request. Senators and representatives may sponsor bills jointly and may "sign on" as co-sponsors of bills originating in either house by asking the clerk of the appropriate house to add their names as sponsors.

Types of Legislation

Most bills, if passed, become *public acts*, which are laws of general application codified in the Connecticut General Statutes. Bills dealing with individual towns, corporations, or special districts, or that impose requirements for a limited time become *special acts*. *Resolutions* express the General Assembly's sentiments but are not laws and do not have to be signed by the governor. They are used for such purposes as confirming nominations, approving state employee collective bargaining agreements, approving settlements of claims against the state, extending congratulations or sympathy, making appointments, expressing opinions about national or international affairs, and adopting session rules. A Senate or House resolution (SR or HR) requires action by the house of origin only. A Senate or House joint resolution (SJR or HJR) requires action by both houses.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Bill Drafts and Hearings

Each committee considers the proposed bills referred to it and orders full drafts in formal statutory language of those it decides merit further consideration. Committees can also decide to hold "subject matter hearings" on proposed bills without having them fully drafted. A committee may also "raise" bills on subjects within its jurisdiction for public hearing. Committee bills (fully drafted bills based on proposed bills) and raised bills (fully drafted bills introduced by a committee that are not based on a proposed bill) are drafted by attorneys in the Legislative Commissioners' Office (LCO) and returned to the committee for consideration. The committee holds hearings to give the public an opportunity to express views on bills. Legislators, state agency officials and municipal chief elected officials are allowed to testify during the first hour of a public hearing.

Committee Reports

After the committee has considered a bill, it may (1) issue no report, in which case the bill fails; (2) issue an unfavorable report; or (3) issue a joint favorable (JF) report. When a committee votes to report a bill or resolution favorably, it is submitted to LCO, which has 10 days to check it for constitutionality, general accuracy, and consistency with existing statutes and to correct references and phraseology. LCO then refers the bill to the offices of Legislative Research and Fiscal Analysis, which have five days to prepare, respectively, a plain-language explanation of its legal effect ("bill analysis") and a statement of its fiscal impact ("fiscal note").

Bills Not Acted On in Committee

If a committee does not JF a bill, it may nevertheless be required to report it out by (1) the speaker and the president pro tempore certifying the need for action (emergency certification) or (2) a majority of the members of either house petitioning the committee for a report and filing the petition with the clerk within a specified time. Petitioned bills are considered unfavorable reports unless the committee receiving the petition meets to vote to JF it.

SENATE AND HOUSE ACTION

Files and Calendars

Each favorably reported bill, with its bill analysis and fiscal note, receives a file number and is placed on the calendar in its house of origin in the order that the clerks receive it from LCO. If the bill is not expected to be controversial, the majority and minority leaders can place it on the consent calendar. Bills on the consent calendar can be passed as a group without discussion. Any member may object to any consent calendar bill and ask for it to be returned to the regular calendar for a full debate and separate vote at the proper time. A bill can be passed even if it is not printed and in the members' files if the speaker and the president pro tempore certify in writing that an immediate vote is necessary. But members must still have a copy of the bill and a fiscal note on their desks before the vote.

General Debate and Voting

General debate and action on a bill is in order on the third day after the bill has been printed for the files and on the calendar for two session days. In general, a simple majority of those present can pass a bill or adopt an amendment. The law requires a super-majority to pass a constitutional amendment, a plan to redistrict the General Assembly, a constitutional convention bill, a bill to exceed or amend the definition of the state's constitutional spending cap, or to reject an arbitration award resolving a state employee contract impasse. Final votes to pass or reject a bill must be taken by roll call. Members' votes are printed in the daily House and Senate Journals.

Members may offer amendments before the final vote. The chamber must adopt amendments either by voice or roll call votes before acting on the bill. In the House, a roll-call vote on an amendment may be requested by one-fifth of the members present. In the Senate, one senator may request a roll call vote. Except during the last three days of the regular session, a bill receiving a favorable vote in the chamber where it originated must be held for one session day for possible reconsideration. If the bill is not reconsidered, it is sent to the other house and placed on the calendar there. The rule requiring bills to be held for one day after passage is commonly suspended for immediate transmittal to the other house.

Both houses must pass the bill in the same form before it may be sent to the governor. A bill that is amended in the second house must be returned to the first house for approval. In the event of disagreeing action between the two houses, a committee of conference is appointed to work out an agreement.

THE GOVERNOR

After a bill passes both houses, it is sent to the governor. The governor may approve or veto the bill. A bill becomes law when the governor signs it. A bill becomes a law without his/her signature if he/she fails to act within five days if the General Assembly is in session, or within 15 days if it has adjourned. If the governor vetoes a bill, it is returned with her objections to its house of origin. A two-thirds vote of the members of each house is required to override a veto.

Lobbying

(based on a *Wellstone Action Guide*)

Research your Public Official

Here are a few things you'll want to know.

So, who represents me?

If you are trying to influence policy and you don't know who makes what decisions you are probably headed down a difficult road. Learning who makes which decision is the first step in becoming an effective citizen lobbyist. On the state level, there are State House and State Senate websites. Websites for your legislator can be found on the General Assembly's website <http://www.cga.ct.gov>. This website will also have information about how to contact your representatives.

Ok, but has my legislator voted on my issue in the past?

On the General Assembly website you can look up each committee and find the bills for the current session listed under the committee tab, your legislators vote (if he/she is on the committee) will be recorded there for a given committee bill. In general if you know the number of a bill you can put it into the general assembly's search box and find out how your legislator has voted as a member of his/her respective chamber. **Project Vote Smart** can be a useful resource if your legislator has responded to information request from the organization. You can search there by going to <http://www.votesmart.org>. You can also call your elected official's office and ask.

Do you and your elected official have anything in common?

Elected officials are people too. They do not enter office without a history, a set of experiences, commitments to various issues and personal styles. In order to be effective with a legislator at any level of government, it is important to get to know them and their story:

- **Learn their biographies** - their profession, their education, their family situation and their involvement in community issues.
- **Know their districts.** Research the area they represent - what are the demographics, the geography, the economy, the resources and the challenges of the person's district.
- **Discover their policy interests.** What issues motivated them to become an elected official? On which issues do they exert leadership? What life experiences have made certain issues real to them? Whose opinion on issues do they value?
- **Learn their community interests.** Find out where they volunteer, where they worship and what they care about in their communities. Find out what they did before becoming a legislator.
- **Find your shared interests by letting them get to know you.**

It is important to give lawmakers a chance to get to know you before you need their assistance in the heat of a decision making process. Invite them to visit your agency, organization, neighborhood or community when they are not legislating. Explain what you do and how it affects people's lives. Take the time to listen to elected officials and get to know their concerns. Demonstrate that you can be a resource to them and look for opportunities to provide them information and other assistance. Maintain contact throughout the year and thank them if they do things that deserve praise and support.

Research the Issue

While entering this world may be overwhelming being armed with information is a useful way to empower us to make impact. That knowledge when combined with our stories and experiences are very powerful.

Some questions to ask yourself:

1. What is the status of your issue/bill at the legislature? Is this a "good" year?

Are any elected officials have indicating support for your issue? Is there public support behind it/ good media attention? Who are your opponents?

2. Who do you need to get on board?

Who are the stakeholders in this issue? Who are the allies you need to have on board because they increase the power you have to move the issue? Which decision-makers do you need to move (committee chairs, legislation sponsors, etc)?

3. Who else is working on this? Can you coordinate?

4. Who can you influence?

5. What is the time frame?

Communicate with your representative

There are many ways to communicate a message. Your ability to communicate your message depends on what resources you have at your disposal and on what you see as risky or not.

Spin is not just for politicians. The term spin has gotten a bad reputation but creatively spinning your issue helps you stand out from a crowd of a lot of important and good issues:

- Letters to the editor, editorials and commentary.
- Petitions.

- **Phone calls to the targeted decision maker.**
- Faxes to the targeted decision maker.
- **Emails to the targeted decision maker.**
- **Personalized letters and postcards to the targeted decision maker.**
- **Personal visits with the targeted decision maker.**
- Rallies and demonstrations.
- Political theater.
- Press conferences and other earned media events.

In the process of developing tactics to use in your grassroots advocacy campaign, keep these tips in mind:

- **Dominate something.** Concentrate an action in a small period of days, for example, to concentrate its potency.
 - **Do a few things well** rather than many things poorly.
 - **Make the strategy personal.**
 - **Force multiply.** Find ways to leverage your existing volunteer advocates to get more volunteer advocates.
 - **Keep recruiting.** Keep a laser focus on building, sustaining, and expanding your base.
- Follow up.** Select strategies that are conducive to reporting back to volunteer advocates

Set up a face-to-face meeting

When conducting a face-to-face lobbying meeting with a legislator, it is important to be **well prepared**. Before you make any connection, plan what you are going to say. Keep your message simple and to-the-point. Know your request (for example, vote for a specific bill) in as few words as possible. If a group of people is making a constituent visit, it is often helpful to assign different roles and practice the visit in advance.

- **Make introductions** and *be clear who is a constituent* in a meeting. Legislators are **most responsive** to the people who can keep them in office
- **Provide brief, clear statements** about the problem and your solution. Think about your key points in advance and have the whole group making the visit agreed

to communicating them.

- **Personal stories are important** because they make the issues real and demonstrate the human impact of policy decisions. Use stories to illustrate the problem and the need.
 - **It is also important to personalize your comments and provide local context.** Make a strong connection between the issue and the local community that the legislator represents. Use local examples that illustrate why your issue is important and why your position is a strong one.
 - **Support your case with facts.** The point here is to support your case not to bury them in a pile of numbers.
 - **Listen what your legislator says in response.** The point of your meeting is not simply to give the legislator information but also to learn something about your legislators thinking. Pay attention to the direct and indirect statements of support or opposition.
- Ask for their support.** If you don't ask for it don't expect it. It doesn't matter if you have a good issue, it doesn't matter if the legislator *should* be on board you still need to ask for support

If they support you:

- **Thank them, and thank them again. (Maybe throw in another for good measure)**
 - **Be a resource to them.** If they need additional information or help in any way, offer to make that available to them.
- Try to move them from being a supporter to a champion of your cause.** Ask them if they will carry the bill (or issue) to their colleagues, speak at a public event, write a commentary for the newspaper, to any other action which will move the legislation forward.

If they oppose you:

- **Thank them for their time and don't waste yours.** Don't continue trying to sway them. Move on to others who may support you.
- Stay cordial and friendly.** This makes good sense if you disagree here because this legislator may be an ally in the future and you do not want to create an enemy who may work against your bill