How A Bill Becomes a Law

Bill Idea

Ideas for bills come from legislators, the governor, government agencies, businesses, groups lobbying for specific causes—and you the citizen. After alegislator is approached with a bill idea, he'she may decide to author a bill which reflects the idea.

House of Origin

A bill can be introduced into either the state Senate or Assembly, depending on whether the author is a Senator or Assemblymember.

Policy Committee

Bills are assigned to a policy committee based upon the subject matter. The policy committee decides the idea in the bill is good public policy for California. Testimony is heard from interested parties.

Floor Debate & Vote If the bill is approved by policy

Second House
If the house of origin approves the bill, it is then submitted to the other house.

and fiscal committees, it is then debated and voted on by all the members of that house –either the Senate or Assembly.



Fiscal Committee

Most bills then go to a fiscal committee (Appropriations) to determine the probable cost and to devise a way to pay for the proposed program.



Policy & Fiscal Committees

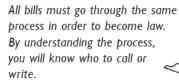
The policy committee of the second house then discusses the merits of the bill. The bill must also be examined by the fiscal committee of the second house.

Floor Debate & Vote

If the bill makes it out of both committees in the second house, it is finally voted on by all the members of that house.

Governor's Office

After a bill has been passed by both houses, the governor can sign the bill, veto the bill, or take no action, which results in the bill becoming law without his/her signature. During the regular session, the governor has 12 days in which to sign or veto a bill that has reached his/her desk. At the conclusion of the legislative year, he/she has 30 days in which to act.



Influencing Legislators

If you write a letter to your Legislator, does it do any good? According to a study published by the American University's Institute for Government Public Information Research, Congressional Representatives and Senators consider constituent mail and telephone calls to be "the most important kind of communication in developing positions on issues and legislation."

Note: The above-mentioned report was issued in 1982. Since then, emails, blogs, on-line publications and news amalgamators have become very influential on elected representatives. Since 2001, email rather than "snail-mail" has been the preferred method of written communication.

How to Lobby and Understanding the Legislative Process



CALIFORNIA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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"In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation."

—U.S. Bishops, Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, 2007

Let your Legislator know what you think

Legislators are interested in what their constituents are thinking. There are many ways of contacting your legislator—in person, by email, by "snail mail," or through petitions.

Legislators are also glad to speak to local church, club or professional groups. Invite them through their local office.

Face-to-Face Meetings

As a rule, personal contacts are the most effective.

In Sacramento: Legislators are very receptive to visitors in their offices in the State Capitol. An appointment helps but is not necessary.

Because Legislators rely heavily on their staff, meeting with the staff person who works on the issues you are interested in can be as valuable as meeting directly with your Legislator.

At Home: Legislators are often available on Fridays and over weekends during the session. Appointments can be made through their local offices.

Suggestions for Personal Visits

Set up an interview together with several friends, or invite your Legislator to a home meeting for discussion and exchange of ideas.

Guidelines for your Interview

Keep your group small—not more than five or six people. If your group is too large, your Legislator will make a speech!

The group should be informed about the Legislator's record on specific issues. Ask him/her for elaborations on the points on which you have little information and for clarification on his/her position on others.

Someone in your group should be appointed spokesperson to introduce members of the group and start the conversation.

Questions should be specific. General questions, such as, "What is your stand on social welfare?" permit vague and evasive answers.

Attempt to discover areas of agreement as well as of disagreement, and to explore new ideas. If you succeed, both you and your legislator will gain from the interview. Be brief!

Timing is Important

The most effective time to communicate with your legislator about a bill in which you are interested is before it comes up for committee hearing. Your Legislator's office can let you know when the bill is scheduled for hearing.

For the text of the bill, the status of the bill, and the dates and places of pending committee hearings, go to www.leginfo.ca.gov

If you plan to attend a committee hearing, check by phone with the author's office before leaving, to find out whether the bill is still to be heard that day.

Writing Letters or Emails

If a personal visit is not possible, you can express your opinion by letter or email. Following are suggestions for writing letters:

- Use your own words and your own stationery
- Address the letter to either your own Legislator or to a committee chair.
- Keep your letter short, clear and legible.

Following are suggestions for writing both letters and emails:

- Identify the bill you are discussing by title and number
- Make sure your correspondence is timely—when legislation is pending in a committee.

The proper form of address:

Dear Senator _____ Dear Assemblymember

Email addresses

Senate: <first name.lastname>@sen.ca.gov **Assembly:** <firstname.lastname>@asm.ca.gov

• Begin your correspondence with a commendation for a vote or speech, an expression of support for a courageous stand

and/or an encouragement for continued leadership.

- In the body of your correspondence, give the reasons for your stand, drawing on personal experience if possible, and raise questions—a well formulated question can express a viewpoint and encourage response.
- Conclude your correspondence with a request for action and if appropriate, a response in writing.

Phone Calls

Person-to person phone calls are very effective, especially if you have had a previous contact. To find your Legislator's phone number, go to *mmw.leginfo.ca.gov.* If you do not have internet access, please call the Chief Clerk of the Assembly: *916.319.2856* or the Secretary of the Senate: *916.651.4171*.