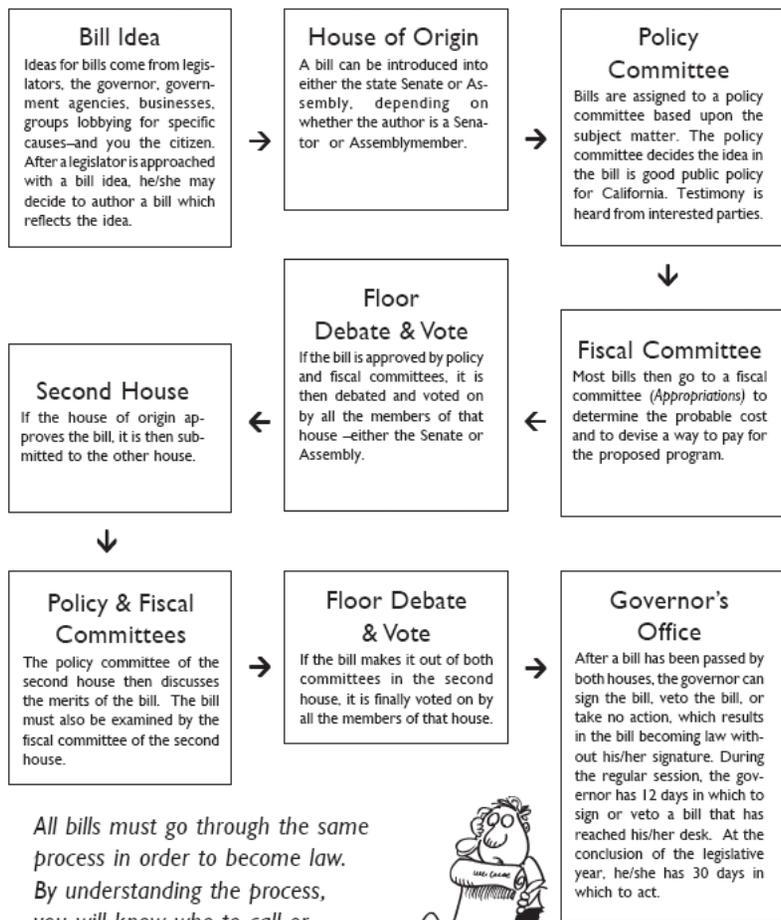


How A Bill Becomes a Law



All bills must go through the same process in order to become law. By understanding the process, you will know who to call or write.



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



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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:

The Honorable _____
California State Senator
or
California State Assembly
State Capitol
10th and L Streets
Sacramento, CA 95814

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 www.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.