

# Making a Difference



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# Advocacy basics

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- ✓ **Enthusiasm and passion**
- ✓ **Provide information and point of view**
- ✓ **Work in and with coalitions**
- ✓ **Legislation = public policy**

# How does legislation happen?

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- Someone wants the legislature to do something about something they care about (change public policy)
  - A change in law
  - Funding for a program or project
  - A new law

# How does legislation happen?

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- Decide what you want the legislature to do --
  - Discuss it with others
  - Do some research
    - Research about what you want done
    - Research about possible solutions

# How does legislation happen?

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- After you know what you want done -
  - Find out if other people or organizations want the same thing and ask them to join with you or you can join with them
    - Coalitions can be more effective

# How does legislation happen?

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- Talk to your legislators about it
  - Explain it
  - Tell stories to illustrate it
  - If possible, show them the “situation”
  - Listen to ideas that they might have
  - Ask them to help you get it done

# When should we start working on making legislation happen? **Now!**

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- Working on changes in public policy happens all year long
  - Don't wait until a legislative session starts
  - Interim legislative committees meet during each summer and fall
  - Legislators have more time to talk with you when they are not "in session."

## What about the executive branch of government?

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- Try to talk with the executive agency or department that will be implementing your legislation.
  - They can be helpful.
  - It is important that they understand how the legislation should be implemented when it becomes law.



## What are interim legislative committees?

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- Interim committees include legislators from both houses and parties
- They generally meet monthly from June through November
- They are organized by topics
- They recommend legislation

## Can I speak before an interim committee?

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- **YES!!**
- You should contact the chairman of the committee and ask to be on the agenda for one of their meetings
  - **This is an opportunity to explain what you want the legislature to do**
    - **Use local stories, if you can**

# How does a bill get written?

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- What you want the legislature to do must be written in the form of a bill.
  - You don't have to write it!
  - The legislator who is working with you will ask the Legislative Council Service staff to write a bill about your issue.

## When should we start contacting legislators to support our issue?

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- **Now!**
- It is very effective to contact and talk with legislators before a legislative session starts.
  - They have more time to meet with you when they are at home
  - Ask others to contact their legislators

## Does contacting legislators make a difference?

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- **YES!**
- What you think about an issue counts and legislators care about what you think!
- Your legislators represent you.

# Communication Basics

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- Be courteous, respectful, friendly and positive
- Don't be arrogant, condescending or threatening
- Be brief and accurate
- Be sure to mention if you are a constituent -- You are important!

# Communication Basics

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- Listen carefully
- Be appreciative; acknowledge past support
- Be specific; if possible, refer to specific legislation or issue
- Don't be afraid to say "I don't know" in answer to a question:
  - Find the answer and get back to them later

# How do I communicate with policymakers?

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## Letter Writing, including email messages

- Letters can be the most powerful means of communicating with public officials
- Write about only one issue per letter
- Neatly handwrite, type or email your letter
- Try to include supporting facts and give reasons for your position
- Refer to a specific bill, if possible



# How do I communicate with policymakers?

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- Put your return address on the letter and the envelope
- Use the proper form of address
  - “The Honorable” on the address on both the envelope and the heading
  - “Dear Representative” or “Dear Senator” is the salutation
- Brevity is even more important for email messages!

# How do I communicate with policymakers?

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## “Letters to the Editor” of a newspaper

- Very effective way of influencing both public policy and public opinion
- Keep your letter short - about 250 words
- Get to the point and write in simple language
- Sign your letter with your contact info
- Newspapers accept letters electronically

# How do I communicate with policymakers?

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## Telephone calls

- During legislative sessions, office staff answer most calls to lawmakers.
- When you call a legislator at home, you may reach them or, more likely, an answering system.
- Be brief and specific
  - Talk about only one issue per call

# How do I communicate with policymakers?

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## Personal Visits

- Follow “Communication Basics”
- It is most effective to try to make an appointment while lawmakers are at home in their districts.
- During sessions:
  - Expect brief visits
  - You may have to simply leave a note saying you came by and briefly stating your position or issue

# How do I communicate with policymakers?

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## Attend Committee Hearings (interim & session)

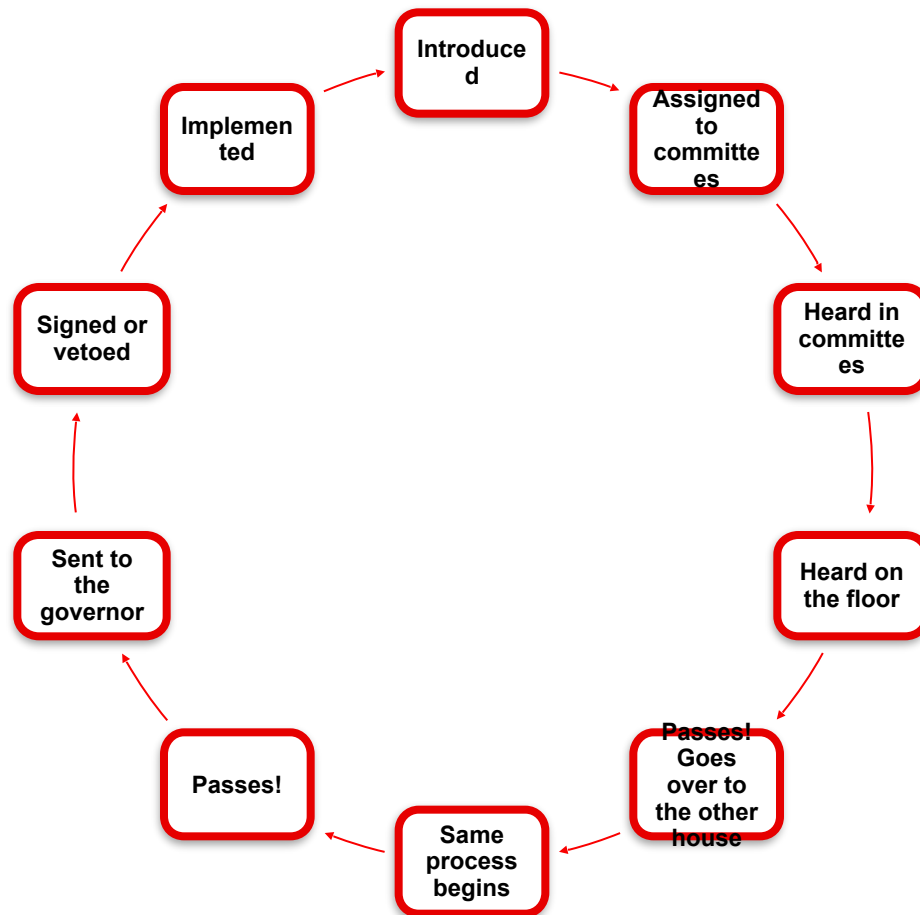
- Anyone may attend and testify
- Chairman will ask if anyone would like to speak either in favor of or opposed to the bill being discussed
- Stand, identify yourself, and briefly state your position
- Don't speak for an organization unless you know its official position
- Committee meeting schedules and agendas can be long and unpredictable

# Remember --

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**As long as you are sincere and polite, there is no wrong way to communicate with a policymaker!**

# What happens to a bill?



# You can make a difference!

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- **Advocacy is --**
  - **Exciting**
  - **Challenging**
  - **Crucial**
  - **Long term**