

**A  
CITIZEN'S  
GUIDE  
TO  
LOBBYING**

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## INTRODUCTION

The basic premise of government in the United States was stated simply by Abraham Lincoln in the Gettysburg Address: "A Government Of the People, By the People, For the People..."

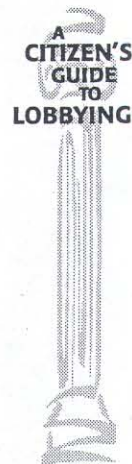
Unfortunately, many people are intimidated by the governmental process, not knowing where to turn to solve a problem or how to influence a policy decision.

This pamphlet explains how to effectively participate in the legislative, or law-making, process. The legislative process is most effective when people share their views with their elected representatives. By lobbying, average citizens can influence an elected official's position on an issue.

Influencing the legislative process begins with informed citizens. Keep up on the issues and know who the elected officials are who make the decisions at each level of government – whether it be the City Council, the County Board of Supervisors, the State Legislature or Congress.

You can influence your elected officials by communicating your views. Write a letter or make a phone call to your legislator's office. Many legislators hold regular public forums where you can ask questions and express your views. You may also make an appointment to talk to the legislator or a staff member.

By actively participating, you can become part of the process. You can influence the decisions that establish policy and create law.



## **GET TO KNOW YOUR LEGISLATORS**

It is important to become familiar with your elected officials. This is easier than you might think. Although state and national representatives split their time between the home districts and either Sacramento or Washington, D.C., legislators and their staff are readily available. Elected officials typically have offices in both communities.

Many legislators hold public meetings to get to know the people they represent – their constituents – and to learn about their concerns. By understanding the issues in a community, a legislator can more adequately represent constituents.

The easiest way to meet your legislator is to attend public meetings or to make an appointment to see your representative.

## **CORRESPOND WITH YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS**

Contact from citizens can greatly influence a legislator's position on issues. Hearing concerns from the community helps to inform legislators on issues of importance to their constituents. It also helps them to establish useful resources on particular issues affecting their citizens, and it allows them to effectively represent their constituents.

Legislators are contacted not only by their constituents, but by citizens throughout California. Most legislators respond promptly. However, due to the large volume of letters and phone calls they receive, they often respond only to residents of the communities they represent.

Listed on the next page are some helpful guidelines to use when writing your letter.



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**DO:**

- Put your views in writing and send the letter to your legislator's office as early in the session as possible.
- Address your representative properly; use correct titles such as Assembly Member Smith or Senator Smith.
- Be brief and to the point, courteous and reasonable.
- Include your name and address.
- Write if you need help dealing with governmental departments or agencies.
- Be direct about identifying the problem and how existing law affects the problem. Provide specific suggestions on what should be done.
- Show the local effects and tangible positive results of your position.
- Have each member of a group send a letter.
- Include articles from local newspapers that reinforce your concerns.
- Before writing, find out to which committee the bill has been assigned.
- Write the committee chairperson and the individual committee members prior to the bill's hearing.
- Make sure any petitions clearly spell out the issue and the bill involved.
- Say "Thank You."
- Ask your legislator to inform you how he or she voted and why.
- Be willing to compromise.

**DON'T:**

- Rely on a phone call to your legislator's office.
- Limit your letter to one lawmaker.
- Rule out mounting a local petition drive.
- Write to another legislator simply because you disagree with your representative.
- Be rude, threatening or intimidating.
- Use a FORM LETTER.
- Wait until the last minute before a bill is heard before writing.
- Be vague or just complain.
- Just let your state or regional committee send letters.
- Rely on the threat of the legislator losing your vote.
- Give up if your concern is not fully addressed.



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## SAMPLE LETTER

(Date)

The Honorable (member's name)  
California State Senate (Assembly)

(Address)

Dear Senator/Assemblymember (member's name):

I am writing in support of (opposition to) SB/AB (bill number) that will be heard on the Senate/Assembly floor in the upcoming week/month.

The bill will have the following effect in the community:  
(Expand on issues related to the bill.)

Thank you for taking time to review my concerns on this legislation. After this bill comes up for a vote, I would appreciate being informed as to how you voted and why. I am available to answer questions or provide testimony on this important issue.

Sincerely,

(your name)

(address)



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## COMMON MISTAKES MADE WHEN CORRESPONDING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

1. Addressing an elected official with an incorrect title, for example, confusing a California State Senator with a United States Senator. Letters are either returned to you or lost in the mail in these cases.
2. Forgetting to include your address and phone number. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for a legislator to answer your letter.
3. Writing lengthy letters which do not clearly state your concerns or position on a piece of legislation.
4. Not writing legibly. The office needs to be able to read your name, address and your concern.

## HOW TO LOBBY

It is important to know the steps in the legislative process to understand how an idea or issue becomes a bill, and how a bill becomes law. After reviewing the legislative process, a strategy must be plotted to increase the chances of the bill's passage or defeat.

- California has a bicameral (two house) legislature. The Assembly has 80 members who serve no more than three two-year terms, and the Senate has 40 members who serve no more than two four-year terms.
- The bill process begins with an idea which often comes from an individual or group who brings the issue to a legislator and asks the legislator to author a bill. The individual or group becomes the bill's sponsor.
- The proposed legislation goes to Legislative Counsel. They draft the actual bill text. After the author reviews the bill, along with the sponsor, it is then introduced, given a number, and read the first time in the house of origin.
- In both houses, the bills are assigned to policy committees by the Rules Committee. If the bill has any fiscal impact, it must also go to a fiscal committee after it is heard in the policy committee.
- A bill goes through the house of origin first, then repeats the process in the second house. If both houses cannot concur, it goes to Conference Committee. (See charts in back.)



- Once the bill has been introduced, the next step is to figure out who on the committee is sympathetic to your viewpoint and which members need to be persuaded. To evaluate the members' views, look at their interests, voting records and constituencies, as well as their media coverage.

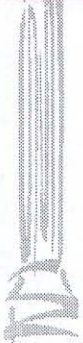
Never assume you know how legislators will vote on an issue. Always check with each legislator to make sure all questions have been answered. More time should be spent with the members who are undecided or who are inclined to vote against you.

When lobbying, remember that legislators are most responsive to their own constituents. Whenever possible ask supporters to contact their own representatives. This is most important when a bill is before a legislative committee.

On most issues, the legislators have done their homework on a bill before the committee hearing and have decided their position. At the hearing itself, the only additional votes to be gained are those by members that are undecided. This means that you should follow up your written position on a bill with a phone call or personal visit to those undecided legislators a day or two before the hearing, either in Sacramento or in their district office.

The most persuasive argument you can use is to tell a legislator how a bill will affect his or her district.

1. Be aware of the member's interests and district concerns.
2. Present issues in a clear and concise manner.
3. Be available to answer questions and provide testimony when needed.
4. Offer to help the member with passage of a bill important to him or her.
5. Provide the necessary follow-up after each stage of the legislative process.



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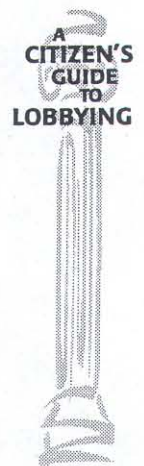
## LOBBYING IN PERSON

Talking to a legislator in person can be extremely helpful in getting the vote you want on a bill. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Find out which legislators are on the committee that will be hearing the bill. (Ask your representative for a list of who sits on each committee.)
2. Set up appointments with committee members to discuss the bill; because of time constraints on legislation, it is often easier for a constituent to get in than for a non-constituent.
3. Be honest with the scheduling person about how much time you need.
4. If a member is unavailable, ask to speak to his or her key aide.
5. Have printed material available.
6. At the meeting, be prepared to quickly present highlights of the bill. Be prepared to list other supporters and discuss the issues which concern the opposition.
7. If the legislator does not agree with your position, be gracious about the difference in views and ask if there are any amendments which would make the bill acceptable. Suggested amendments must be taken back to the author and other supporters of the bill. After a decision is made on the amendment, make sure you get back to the member who suggested the amendment. If the member does not have suggestions for amendments, thank him or her for taking the time to listen to your views.

## TESTIFYING ON A BILL

1. Contact the author of the bill and indicate that you would like to testify.
2. Coordinate your testimony with others who are testifying on the bill so statements before the committee will be brief and not redundant.
3. Be prepared to answer questions on the bill from members, especially on those issues which are of concern to the opposition.
4. Finally, be sure to thank the committee chairperson and the committee members for the opportunity to express your views.





## TOOLS OF EFFECTIVE CITIZEN ADVOCACY

### *Find Out About Issues Or Legislation Important to You*

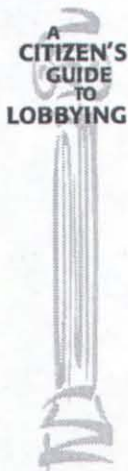
The best source is probably the media. Newspapers, radio and TV all report on legislation of concern to Californians. Most organizations and interest groups publish newsletters. Many of these public interest groups have advocates in the Capitol who have access to the most up-to-date information.

In addition, your legislator's district office staff can help you track down legislation of interest to you. To receive copies of bills, you can also write directly to the Legislative Bill Room, State Capitol, Sacramento 95814. They will provide you with one copy of up to 100 bills free of charge.

### *Stay Current – Bills Are Often Amended*

Again, newsletters and the media are very helpful. There are also official legislative publications found in public libraries and on the Internet at [www.sen.ca.gov](http://www.sen.ca.gov)

- Senate (Assembly) Daily File - printed each day with the agenda and bills set for hearing.
- Senate (Assembly) Weekly History - indicates the status of each bill.
- Senate (Assembly) Daily Journal - the official record of each day's proceedings.
- Legislative Index - the complete listing by subject matter of all bills introduced.
- Call your legislator's district office to get an update on the status of legislation. Also, feel free to visit the office at any time to use the resources available.



### **Types of Legislation**

SB - Senate Bill (AB - Assembly Bill)- bills require a majority vote. If there is a fiscal impact, they require a two-thirds vote.

SCA (ACA) Senate (Assembly) Constitutional Amendment - two-thirds vote of the Legislature and a vote by the people.

SCR (ACR) Senate (Assembly) Concurrent Resolution - relates to general matters of concern to the Legislature.

SJR (AJR) Senate (Assembly) Joint Resolution - conveys to the federal government views of the Legislature.

House Resolutions - matters of concern to one house.

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## ***Communicate With Your Legislator***

Letters are extremely effective. Give your legislator all of the reasons why you support or oppose a particular piece of legislation. Be sure to include your name and address. Send it to either the State Capitol office or to the district office. Telegrams, postcards, petitions, phone calls and personal letters all help.

## **When to Contact Your Legislator**

Each bill is heard a minimum of four times before passing the Legislature — in the policy committees and on the floor of each house. However, you should contact your legislator as early in the session as possible.

## ***Go Online***

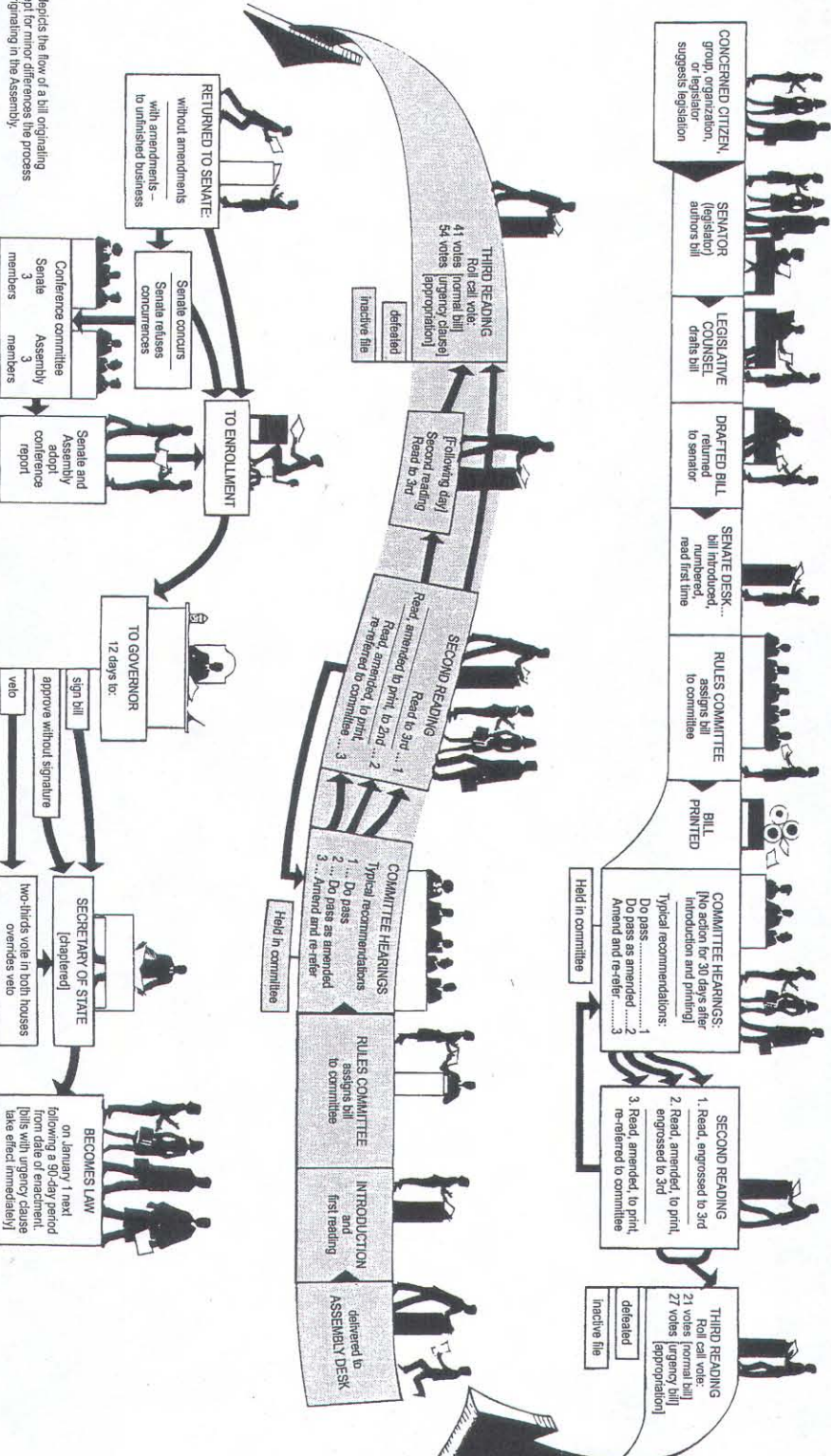
The California State Senate is on the internet. By accessing the Senate Home Page at [www.sen.ca.gov](http://www.sen.ca.gov) you can:

- Find the full text of bills, resolutions and constitutional amendments, their status, history, votes, analyses and veto messages
- Access links to other state agencies and media websites
- Get answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs)
- Listen to and watch live Senate hearings, floor sessions and press conferences
- Find out about the day's scheduled events, agendas of upcoming hearings, floor session schedules, the Legislative calendar and deadlines
- Look at a glossary of legislative terms
- Visit Senators' home pages
- Find a roster of addresses and phone numbers
- Find out who your Senator is
- View district maps
- Get information about Senate and Assembly Committees



# HOW A BILL BECOMES LAW

A simplified chart showing the route a bill takes through the California Legislature.



NOTE: This chart depicts the flow of a bill originating in the Senate, except for minor differences the process is similar for bills originating in the Assembly.