



Florida School Boards Association

The voice of education in Florida.

THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS AT-A-GLANCE

Introduction

The lawmaking process in Florida involves hundreds of people other than the 40 Senators and 120 House of Representative members. This involvement in the process is a continuing activity and goes on in one form or another all year. Besides the formal session of the Legislature which runs approximately two months each year, many committees meet during the interim, and numerous hearings are held. Professional staff personnel work on a 12-month basis to provide technical assistance to their respective committees or legislators. All of this allows each individual and/or groups of individuals in the state the opportunity to participate in the democratic process. The following information is a synopsis of the legislative process and identifies strategies which will help the citizens of our state to participate actively and effectively in the legislative process. The major topics covered are what to do in the interim (when the Legislature is not in session), how to attain lobbying objectives, and what is involved in testifying before and influencing action by the Florida Legislature.

How a Bill Becomes a Law

- A. Legislators or other interested parties have an idea which is brought to the attention of the proper individual, i.e., the legislator.
- B. A bill is drafted and filed by either a Senator or a House member. The bill is then assigned to one or more committees, depending upon the content of the bill (e.g. Education Committee, Appropriations Committee, Finance and Tax Committee, etc.).
- C. Bills approved in a committee are reported out to the next committee(s) of reference and then to the floor of the House and Senate for further action. This includes bills with all amendments already made in committee. Further amendments can be made on the floor of the House or Senate. A bill should always have a “companion” bill. That is, if a bill is filed in the House, a bill of the same or similar nature is also drafted and filed in the Senate.
- D. After a bill passes one house of the Legislature, it must proceed to the other, and the process begins all over. Committee hearings are held, amendments are proposed, the bill must be passed by the committee(s) of reference, and then the bill must be passed on the floor.
- E. Once a bill has passed both houses in an identical form it proceeds to the Governor for his signature and thus becomes law. If the Governor vetoes the bill, then it takes a 2/3 majority of both the Senate and the House to override his veto. A bill may also become a law if the Governor does not sign or veto it within 7 days after the bill has been presented to the Governor.
- F. However, if the Legislature adjourns sine die or takes a recess for more than 30 days during that 7 day period, the Governor shall have 15 consecutive days from the date of presentation to act on the bill. If the Governor does not sign or veto it within that period, the bill becomes law.

The public, or its representatives, has an opportunity to provide input on legislation at each stage of this legislative process.

What can be done during the months the Legislature is not in session?

A. Establish Positions on Issues

1. Since many general and specific issues may surface, it is well to determine which issues to address and prioritize the list in order to determine which should get the most attention.
2. Many times it is difficult for the entire group to agree on the concept or total issue. Try to get a consensus position which may mean compromising. Keep in mind that “compromise” is a form of victory.
3. Do not use all your energy passing “meaningless” legislation or fighting causes of minor concern. Concentrate your efforts on high priority, important issues.

B. Utilize the Opportunity for Input During the Interim Period

1. Get to know your local legislative delegation. Make an appointment at the local level, go see the legislators, explain your position, and offer to work with them during the entire year. Provide them with any information you have and any information they may need to assist with the proposed legislation.
2. Waiting until the start of the regular session is usually too late. Many times differences, questions and other problems can be resolved during the interim. This will allow going into the session with more unity and thus, more support.
3. Do not use all your energy passing “meaningless” legislation or fighting causes of minor concern. Concentrate your efforts on high priority, important issues.

C. Develop a State-Wide Network

1. An email network or some other formalized system of communication is essential. This should be developed in such a way as to prevent any gaps or breaks in the system and to provide instant communication. This will assure the ability to react quickly to all issues when necessary.
2. It is also imperative to stay informed during the session on the issues, the mood of the Legislature, and the status of your particular legislation. Emails, newsletters, memos, and phone calls are helpful in this area. When you receive this information, READ IT! If you have a question call and find out the details so that you can be better informed when you talk to your legislators or their aides.

D. Be Sure All Information Is Factual and Accurate

1. Research your issues carefully. You can inspire your legislators to have confidence in your information by making certain that all information is fair and accurate. At the same time, brevity is essential. Long, detailed studies simply do not get the attention desired.
2. Check and double check your facts! The quickest way to have a legislator lose confidence in you, and also to lose a bill, is to present inaccurate information. It makes legislators look bad and it makes you look worse.

Lobbying

What can be done to lobby effectively for legislation?

A. The Legislative Staff

It is important to become acquainted with the staff members assigned to legislators and the staff members assigned to the committees with which you will work.

B. Always Identify Yourself on Each Contact

Public officials and staff meet many people. It is impossible for them to remember everyone. Be sure to identify yourself and remind them of your special interest.

C. Familiarize Yourself with Each Issue

Be aware of the status of each bill that relates to a subject in which you are interested. Update yourself daily so you know where your bill is at all times.

You should know --

- ... To which committees your bill has been assigned.**
- ... In which committee your bill currently is.**
- ... When the committee is scheduled to hear your bill.**
- ... What amendments have been filed or added to your bill.**
- ... When your bill will be heard on the floor.**

D. Know Your local Legislators

- ... Study their past record on related issues.**
- ... Know you legislators' interests and all of the committees to which all of your legislators are assigned.**
- ... Try to determine the most effective approaches.**
- ... Identify any prior commitment to your cause.**
- ... Encourage legislators to promote support for your issues among their colleagues.**

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