



Advocacy 101: Learn About the Legislative Process

How a Bill Becomes a Law

Bills may be sponsored by a senator or representative, by a Senate or House committee, by a state agency, or submitted by the governor. All bills must be approved by both the Senate and the House before being sent to the governor for final approval.

When a bill is introduced by members of a legislative chamber, it must follow a process and, if passed, be sent to members in the other legislative chamber where this process is repeated. The bill and its language must be approved in identical form from both chambers before being sent to the governor.

“Most lawmakers’ votes are won or lost at fish fries, not in committee meetings.” —Bob Guyer of Engineering the Law, Inc.

That is why building a productive legislative relationship is so extremely important!

Initial Bill Process

INTRODUCTION

After the bill draft is completed by the nonpartisan Legislative Services Agency (LSA), it is returned to the sponsor for review and filed with the Secretary of the Senate or Chief Clerk of the House, who assigns the bill a number. The bill is “read in” on either the House or Senate floor, starting the process by which it is considered. The President of the Senate or Speaker of the House assigns the bill to a standing committee for review.

STANDING COMMITTEE WORK

A standing committee is a group of legislators chosen by the leadership of each party and chamber to examine all bills relating to a specific subject area. Once a bill is assigned to a committee, the committee chairperson and ranking member appoint a subcommittee. The subcommittee, usually composed of three or five members of the standing committee, reviews the bill in detail and reports its conclusions to the full committee. The full committee then discusses the subcommittee’s conclusions and makes recommendations to the entire chamber. The committee may recommend they pass the bill, pass the bill with amendment, refer the bill to another committee for study, postpone the bill indefinitely, or pass the bill without recommendation.

CALENDAR

A report of the committee's recommendation is sent to the Secretary of the Senate or Chief Clerk of the House, who will place the bill on the Regular Calendar, which lists bills that are eligible to be debated.

DEBATE

After the committee completes work on the bill, the subcommittee's chairperson usually becomes the bill's floor manager. The floor manager's job is to present the bill to the chamber and follow the bill's progress during debate, during which members discuss and may propose amendments to the bill. Amendments are adopted by a simple majority of the senators or representatives voting. If a constitutional majority (at least 26 Senators or 51 Representatives) votes to pass the bill, it moves to the other chamber. If fewer legislators than a constitutional majority vote to pass the bill, the bill fails.

SECOND PASSAGE

Amendments adopted by the chamber of origin become part of the bill before it is sent to the other chamber. As the bill follows its path through the Legislature, the procedure in both chambers is basically the same. A bill introduced in the Senate will retain its Senate number as it travels through the House and a bill introduced in the House will retain its House number as it travels through the Senate. If the bill is further amended by the other chamber, the amended bill is sent back to the chamber of origin for approval. If the chamber of origin concurs or agrees with the amendment(s), the bill has passed both chambers in identical form and will be sent to the governor for review. If the chamber of origin refuses to concur with the other chamber's amendment(s) or amends the amendment, the bill is returned to the other chamber, which may recede from, or insist upon, their amended version of the bill or adopt the amendment of the house of origin. If they recede, the bill is sent to the governor. If they insist upon their amendment(s), a conference committee is appointed to work out the differences.

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

Conference committees are composed of Senate and House members representing both the majority and minority parties and both sides of the issue in dispute. The 10 members of a conference committee are appointed by the Senate Majority and Minority Leader and the Speaker of the House and the House Minority Leader to study the points of disagreement between the chambers in an attempt to reach a compromise. If an agreement is reached, it is presented to both chambers in a report that contains the compromise version of the bill. The report cannot be amended by either chamber. If the report is rejected by either chamber, a second conference committee may be appointed. If no agreement is reached, the bill fails. If the conference committee report is adopted, the chambers again vote on the bill. If the bill is approved, it will be enrolled and sent to the governor for review.

ENROLLMENT

Final preparation of a bill before it is sent to the governor is called enrollment. When both chambers have passed the bill in the same form, it is prepared with all approved amendments incorporated. After the bill is enrolled, the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House sign the enrolled version and the Secretary of the Senate or Chief Clerk of the House certifies that the bill originated in that chamber. The bill is then sent to the governor for final action.

GOVERNOR'S ACTION

Bills passed by the Legislature must be reviewed by the governor. The governor takes final action on all bills passed by the Iowa General Assembly. The governor has three options: sign the bill, veto the bill (or item veto an appropriations bill), or take no action. In the case of a veto, the Legislature may override the veto with two-thirds of the members of each chamber voting to reconsider and pass the bill a second time. If, during the legislative session, the governor does not sign or veto a bill, it becomes law after three calendar days (except Sundays). Bills received by the governor during the last three calendar days of session (except Sundays) must be signed or vetoed within 30 calendar days.

The governor has the option to use three types of vetoes: the veto, item veto and pocket veto. The veto indicates the governor's disapproval of an entire bill. The item veto may be used only for bills which appropriate funds. It strikes a specific item of an appropriations bill. A pocket veto occurs when the governor fails to take action within 30 calendar days on a bill received in the last three calendar days of session (except Sundays). The entire bill fails to become law. When the governor vetoes or item vetoes a bill, a veto message explaining why the veto was made is delivered to the chamber of origin with the bill and is filed with the Secretary of State. The governor's veto messages can be accessed on the Iowa General Assembly Web site in the "Enrolled Bills" section.

IOWA LAW

After the bill is signed by the governor or is passed by the Legislature over the governor's veto, it is sent to the Secretary of State who is the custodian of original copies of all bills enacted into law. Bills normally go into effect July 1 following their approval, unless another date is specified in the bill. Bills passed by the Legislature before July but signed by the governor after July 1 becomes effective August 15.

The enacted bills are then printed in the Acts of the General Assembly, published after each legislative session. The portions of the enacted bills that are laws of a permanent nature are incorporated into the Code of Iowa, a compilation of Iowa laws published every other year. A supplement to the Code is published in the year in which the entire Code of Iowa is not published. These documents are published by the Iowa Code Division of the LSA.

Influencing the Process

There are several critical points at which a school board member can influence the consideration of legislation.

INTRODUCTION

Once a bill is introduced, IASB members can let their legislators know what they think about this particular piece of legislation. IASB will provide weekly updates during the legislative session about bills of interest to IASB members. IASB will take a position on these bills based on the beliefs and resolutions adopted by the Delegate Assembly.

School board members should let their legislators know if they support or oppose a particular piece of legislation upon its introduction. This builds support of the IASB position.

SUBCOMMITTEE CONSIDERATION

If a subcommittee meets on a particular piece of legislation, IASB members have an opportunity to let the members of the subcommittee know their support or opposition to that bill. It is also a good idea to talk to your specific legislators and ask that they communicate your support or opposition to the subcommittee membership.

COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION OF A BILL

Before a bill goes to the floor for debate, the committee must first make a recommendation. This is a great opportunity for IASB members to communicate their support or opposition to a bill. Knowing on which committees legislators representing your school district serve is an important part of this step.

FLOOR DEBATE

If a bill survives the committee process, the next step is floor debate. This is an opportunity for all 100 House members or 50 Senate members to offer an opinion on the legislation before them. Members of each party in each chamber will caucus on specific bills before the floor debate. This is an opportunity for individual legislators to speak up for or against a bill. IASB members should communicate their thoughts on a particular piece of legislation to their legislators in both parties at this point. In addition, IASB members should contact their legislators when a bill is scheduled for floor debate to reiterate their position. IASB will send out Action Alerts on bills of key interest to the organization's members.

Know Your Legislators

Developing a personal relationship with the legislators representing your school district is the most effective tool for successful advocacy.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT YOUR LEGISLATORS:

Their background—Most legislators have played an active role in their communities and other organizations before being elected to the Iowa House or Senate. Knowing this information gives you a clue as to what drives them and the issues that are likely to be important. Many legislators were once school board members. This gives them good insight into the issues that will be important to you. Find out where your legislators come from. Are they farmers? Small businessmen? A former school board member? This information helps you to shape your advocacy.

Committee assignments—The committees your legislators are assigned to indicate their primary areas of interest and influence. For example, a legislator sitting on the Education Committee may be a critical player in efforts to secure sufficient and timely funding for K-12 education.

It is important to keep all legislators advised on education issues. Ultimately, they all vote. Think long-range: Committee memberships change and your legislator—now well-informed through contact with you—may one day serve on a key committee.

To find out your legislators, visit the IASB website at www.ia-sb.org. Use our Legislator Lookup Tool to learn more about your legislators at the Capitol in Des Moines.

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEES THAT IMPACT EDUCATION

Many issues beyond traditional “education” programs impact education. Pay close attention to laws dealing with such areas as state and local taxation, health care, personnel and environmental mandates.

When looking to see if your legislators are on “key” committees that impact education, keep in mind the following committees that are important to public schools:

- **Senate and House Education Committees**—consider bills impacting education policy issues
- **Senate and House Appropriations Committees**—consider bills impacting state and local funding
- **Senate and House Labor Committees**—consider bills impacting school personnel and labor-management issues
- **Senate and House Local Government Committee**—considers bills that impact political subdivisions
- **Senate and House State Government Committees**—consider bills that impact governmental bodies such as sunshine legislation, public bidding requirements, IPERS, elections
- **Senate and House Ways & Means Committees**—consider bills that impact tax policy

How to Make Your Voice Heard in Des Moines

Legislators value clear, concise and informative communication from education advocates. Board members are in a good position to know what state-level policies work and do not work in public schools. Here are some proven ways to communicate effectively with your legislators.

MEETING FACE TO FACE WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

Meeting in person with your legislator is the most effective way to make your views known and influence legislation. You can visit your legislators in Des Moines or meet with them when they are in their home district. During legislative sessions, legislators often hold town hall meetings in their districts or attend other community functions, often in the evenings or on Saturdays. IASB provides a weekly listing of legislative forums for your benefit.

Invite your legislator to visit a school in your district to see programs in action! If a face to face meeting cannot be arranged, consider setting up a conference call with your legislator and several other education advocates. Use IASB talking points, sample questions, or the weekly *Advocacy in Action* newsletter to prepare for your meeting.

EMAILING OR WRITING YOUR LEGISLATOR

E-mailing your legislator is the best option. Be certain to identify yourself as a constituent in the subject line to ensure that your email is not overlooked.

Personal emails or letters can have a considerable impact. When emailing or writing, keep the following in mind:

- Try to focus on one issue or bill per letter and identify the bill, if known, by name and number.
- Express your point of view and explain why your legislator should be supportive. Be brief and courteous.
- Briefly explain the impact on your school district of the legislation. Use district-specific financial data provided by IASB to make your point.
- Request that your legislators take a specific position on the bill. Be clear in what action you want a legislator to take.
- Ask for a response from your legislator.
- When writing an individual letter, use your signature and personal letterhead and state that you are a board member. If it is a collective letter written by the board, have the board president sign it and put it on the board's letterhead.
- Make sure your return address is on the letter (envelopes often get lost) so that your legislator can respond.

For the fastest response to letters, address them to:

Senator [Full Name]
State Capitol
Des Moines, IA 50319
Dear Senator [Last Name]

OR

Representative [Full Name]
State Capitol
Des Moines, IA 50319
Dear Representative [Last Name]

SAMPLE LETTER TO YOUR LEGISLATOR

School District Letterhead
Senator Sam Sample
State Capitol
Des Moines, IA 50319

Dear Senator Sample:

(If you know the legislator personally, customize the greeting as shown.)

I am a school board member from the Dreamfield School District. On behalf of my district, I urge you to support SF 123, which provides adequate and stable funding for Iowa's public schools.

With the enactment of SF 123 my district will be able to (insert local information).

Thank you for your leadership in support of Iowa public schools. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

John Doe
President
Dreamfield School Board
(515) 123-4567
1234 Dreamfield Drive
Dreamfield, IA 12345

Calling Your Legislator

Phone calls are an effective and fast way to communicate with your legislator, especially when a critical vote is coming up.

Phone calls can remind legislators that constituents are closely monitoring their votes. Sometimes you may be able to have a conversation with your legislator. Other times, your calls may simply be tallied by the receptionist and your legislators are then given counts of constituents for and against the particular issue.

When phoning your legislator, prepare notes to stay on message and keep the following in mind:

- **Ask to speak with the legislator**, or briefly state your position to the receptionist. This is one of the times your relationships pay dividends!
- **Give your name**, title, and school district or education agency.
- **Focus on one issue or bill**. Whenever possible, identify the bill by number and name.
- **Briefly state what position** you want your legislator to take on the issue. Be prepared to give a locally based rationale for your position.
- **Ask for your legislator's position on the bill**.
- If asked, **give your address** so that you can receive a written response.
- Follow-up with an email or letter **thanking them** for taking the call and reiterating any commitment made to sponsor or support the bill.

It's OK to call your legislator at home when not in session, either during the interim or on Fridays and weekends, January through April. To contact your legislator during the regular legislative session, call the House switchboard, (515) 281-3221, or Senate switchboard, (515) 281-3371, and ask to be connected to your legislator's office.

Tips for Setting Up Meetings

- **Email or call your legislator** and ask to schedule a meeting. State the subject(s) to be discussed and the time needed. Most meetings in Des Moines last 15 to 20 minutes, although they can last longer especially if a coalition of people is included. Be flexible and patient. Legislators are not often in control of their schedules so even though you may have a meeting scheduled, it may have to be delayed due to the legislative calendar that day.
- Depending on the issue, arrange to make your visit along with several other board members, educators or community members to demonstrate broad support for your position. **Let the legislator know who will be attending the meeting with you.**
- **Email or Call IASB's Government Relations staff** to let us know that you have a meeting scheduled. We'll provide you with the latest information for your meeting.

How to Set Up a Successful Meeting

- **Contact IASB for assistance.** Ask us for talking points, talk about what we might know about your legislator and what caucus positions are being taken.
- **Hold a pre-meeting** with everyone who will be lobbying to make sure all agree on your position. Decide in advance who will discuss which points so that your visit runs smoothly.
- **Be concise** and focus on just a few issues or bills. Remember, your legislator may have no understanding of the bill, so be prepared to educate!
- Whenever possible, **speak from personal experience.** Provide brief anecdotal evidence of how this issue affects your school district, and therefore, the legislator's constituents.
- **Ask directly for your legislator's support.** If legislators are supportive, ask them to convince other legislators of the merits of your position. If they disagree with you, express respectful disappointment, and rebut their argument if you have the facts to do so. Be courteous—you'll have other issues to take up in the future.
- Always provide a concise, one-page **fact sheet or letter** describing your position to be left with your legislator as a reminder of the issues and your visit.
- After the meeting, **email or write a letter to thank legislators** for their time and reinforce your position.

Top 10 Tips for Effective Lobbying

1. Research your legislators' backgrounds, committee assignments, and voting records on your issues.
2. Develop relationships with your legislators by routinely visiting, writing and calling.
3. Don't overdo your lobbying. Only write when you have something important to say—including "thank you."
4. Invite your legislators to visit your schools. Plan a tour of your school district to showcase successful programs in action and demonstrate what schools need from lawmakers.
5. Lobby with your real-life experience. Make it local. It's your most persuasive tool.
6. Set priorities. When everything is important, nothing is important.
7. Shore up lobbying allies from your community to demonstrate broad support.
8. Don't forget the news media. Getting your message out to the news media can influence your legislators and public opinion.
9. Always be positive and courteous. In politics, there are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies.
10. Everyone likes a pat on the back. Remember to thank each of your legislators for jobs well done and for their service.