

## Resources

State Government General Website: [www.ohio.gov](http://www.ohio.gov)

Ohio House of Representatives: [www.house.state.oh.us](http://www.house.state.oh.us)

Ohio Senate: [www.senate.state.oh.us](http://www.senate.state.oh.us)

Legislative Information Office: 1-800-282-0253

Legislative Service Commission: [www.lsc.state.oh.us](http://www.lsc.state.oh.us)

Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review:  
[www.jcarr.state.oh.us](http://www.jcarr.state.oh.us)

Governor's Office: [www.governor.ohio.gov](http://www.governor.ohio.gov)

League of Women Voters of the United States:  
[www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)

Leagues in Ohio: [www.lwvohio.org](http://www.lwvohio.org)

Ohio Revised Code: <http://codes.ohio.gov/orc>

House and Senate Bills:  
[www.legislature.state.oh.us/search.cfm](http://www.legislature.state.oh.us/search.cfm)

House and Senate committees and schedules:  
[www.legislature.state.oh.us/today.cfm](http://www.legislature.state.oh.us/today.cfm)

*You've learned about the candidates...*

*And cast your vote at the election...*

*But there's more to  
public participation than that!*

*What comes next when...*

*There  
oughta  
be a Law*

## *Beyond voting...*

One of your most important rights and responsibilities as a citizen is to participate in government. Once policy makers are elected to office and sent to City Hall, the Statehouse, or the Capitol, your job doesn't end. In fact, communicating your opinions on proposed laws to those policy makers is what republican government is all about. And with all of the lobbying firms and special interests influencing elected officials, it becomes even more important for ordinary citizens to express their concerns. This booklet focuses on influencing policy makers at the state level, here in Ohio, so that laws passed by our General Assembly and signed by our governor reflect your interests and concerns. It explains how a bill becomes a law and how you can get involved in the lawmaking process. For information about influencing policy at the federal or local level, see the Resources section at the end.

## *Now You've Got a Law*

It may take months or even years for your bill to become law. If you are fortunate enough to see your legislation pass, remember that your job isn't over yet.

### ***Thanking Legislators***

Send thank-you notes to the sponsors and other key legislators. In fact, send thank-you letters even if your bill doesn't pass. Because policy makers tend to hear only from unhappy constituents, your appreciation can go a long way the next time you need assistance.

### ***Rulemaking***

Before most laws can be implemented, the appropriate executive agency must enact "rules" that spell out the administrative details that usually are not part of a bill. Rules are also subject to legislative oversight and public input, through a body known as the Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR). Be sure to read the proposed rules for your law and comment on them if necessary.

### ***Sunset***

Most laws include "sunset" provisions establishing a date – often several years away – when the bill will expire or must be reviewed in order to continue. Be sure to follow up at the appropriate time to ensure that important legislation isn't allowed to sunset.

# Tips for Lobbying Policy Makers

Whether you are lobbying the executive branch or legislators, there are certain “do’s” and “don’ts” to observe:

Do...

- ✓ Know the name, number and status of your bill
- ✓ Dress appropriately and maintain courtesy
- ✓ Make an appointment if possible
- ✓ Meet individual legislators in groups of no more than two or three
- ✓ Present your views firmly and without apology
- ✓ Present clear, concise, focused arguments that support your bill
- ✓ End your contact with legislators on a positive note and thank them for their time
- ✓ After the visit, send any requested or follow-up information

Do not...

- ✗ Allow the legislator to move discussion away from the issue
- ✗ Take a threatening, condescending or confrontational tone with legislators
- ✗ Surprise or embarrass a legislator
- ✗ Misrepresent any information about your bill or support for it
- ✗ Threaten to defeat legislators in future elections
- ✗ Overwhelm the legislator with lengthy material
- ✗ Answer questions if you do not have sufficient information
- ✗ Give knee-jerk response to negative comments

# Overview of the Ohio General Assembly

## Membership

The Ohio General Assembly is bicameral, meaning it is composed of two houses. The Ohio House of Representatives is made up of 99 representatives, each of whom represents a smaller district. The Ohio Senate is made up of 33 Senators, each of whom represents a larger district made up of three House districts. Senators serve for four years before running for reelection, representatives for two years. Term limits mean that senators may serve only two consecutive four-year terms and representatives may serve only four consecutive two-year terms. Members may seek reelection to their former office after a waiting period of four years.

The political party that controls a simple majority of seats in each house is called the majority party, and the other party is known as the minority party. The majority party elects the leadership, including the presiding member – known as the president in the Senate and the speaker in the House – and the presiding member, in turn, appoints a chairperson for each committee.

## Sessions

Each session of the General Assembly lasts for two years, starting in January of odd-numbered years and ending in December of the following even-numbered year. Sessions are numbered consecutively so that the legislature that convened in 2007 and adjourned in 2008 is known as the 127<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. The Legislature is charged with passing a biennial (two-year) budget for the operations of state government by June 30 of the first year and a biennial (two-year) budget that

supports large construction projects by June 30 of the second year. In addition to its budget responsibilities, the legislature may propose and pass legislation that alters the Ohio Revised Code (often abbreviated as ORC), the official collection of laws of the state. Bills proposed in prior sessions are referred to by the session number so that, for example, 125-HB 2 refers to House Bill 2 from the 125<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.

### ***Committees***

Each house forms a number of standing committees to which legislators are assigned. Committees cover various areas of public policy, from agriculture to finance to public utilities. Most legislators serve on more than one committee. It is in committees that bills are first debated and amended, and where they can be permanently stalled or passed on for consideration by the entire body. In Ohio, as at the federal level, the majority party has a great deal of power because each committee is composed of a majority of its members. If the majority party is united, it can usually advance or block legislation for consideration by the full body. It is also in committees that testimony from the public is taken during one or more hearings on each bill.

## ***How to Read a Bill***

### ***Numbering***

Bills are numbered consecutively in each house, as they are introduced, and preceded either by HB (House Bill) or SB (Senate Bill) to indicate the originating house. You may also see the abbreviation HJR or SJR, for House/Senate Joint Resolution. Joint resolutions typically propose a state constitutional amendment to be considered by voters. When a bill is amended, it becomes Am. HB 1. If

### ***Coalitions***

Search out other organizations and individuals that may share your concerns. Even if your issues are not their top priorities, they may be supportive. There is strength in numbers, as well as in broad support that crosses party lines. And they may have contacts with legislators that you do not yet have.

### ***Protest/demonstrations***

Citizens should deliberate carefully before organizing a protest. While large, peaceful demonstrations can send a powerful message to policy makers, they can also end up being counter-productive. A small turnout, a violent act, a misinterpreted message can all mar the efficacy of a protest.

## ***Less Effective ways To Communicate***

### ***Petitions***

While signing petitions is a simple act that ordinary citizens can take, mass petitions have lost their effectiveness over the years. Online petitions in particular carry virtually no influence with policy makers.



## *Somewhat* Effective ways To Communicate

### **➤ Action alert response**

Action alerts from advocacy organizations, such as the League of Women Voters, are becoming more and more common – and more easy to use. Often, you can respond quickly by e-mail with a form letter that can be customized. While action alerts are not as effective as the more personal contacts discussed above, they can be helpful in mobilizing a critical mass of citizens.

### **➤ E-mail**

Conventional wisdom suggests that letters and phone calls are more effective than e-mail, but members are beginning to respect technology-driven advocacy. Use the bill number in the subject line of your e-mail. Avoid links to websites and avoid attaching documents. They will seldom be reviewed, and they may trigger the member's spam filter.

### **➤ Media**

Whether you want to promote, defeat, or amend a bill, it is useful to inform the news media of your concerns. Statehouse reporters for major daily newspapers cover committee hearings and floor sessions. Offer them information about your issues, including copies of your testimony. You may also offer information to your local newspapers, as well as radio and TV stations. These are new outlets that your legislator pays close attention to. A letter to the editor can be an effective method of spreading your concerns, while groups of citizens or those representing organizations may be able to meet with the newspaper's editorial board.

it is extensively amended and a substitute bill prepared, it becomes Sub. HB 1; if further amended, it becomes Am. Sub. HB1. Once a bill passes the house in which it originated, it is sent to the other house under the same number. Some bills, such as the budget, must originate in the House of Representatives and then pass to the Senate. Both houses may, at times, introduce similar or even identical bills simultaneously under different numbers in order to speed their consideration.

### **➤ Sponsor**

In order to be introduced, a bill must be sponsored by a member. That legislator's name is listed first on the bill and that member is responsible for "carrying" the bill in both houses, explaining the bill in committee in both houses and on the floor of the originating house, as well as rounding up co-sponsors and answering questions about the bill. The sponsor may introduce a bill individually or obtain cosponsors to show broad support and increase the likelihood that the bill will pass. A bill sponsored by a member of the minority party may be less likely to pass. A bill with bipartisan support, meaning sponsors from both the majority and the minority party, is more likely to pass.

### **➤ Title**

In addition to a number, each bill is assigned a short title, sometimes only one word, which summarizes the bill. Below the title is a paragraph listing the sections of the ORC that the bill amends, enacts, and/or repeals.

### **➤ Format**

Every section of the ORC that is changed by the bill, even if only by one word, is printed in full, in numerical order. Proposed new language is underlined, unchanged existing language is in normal type, and language that is to be deleted has a ~~line through it~~.

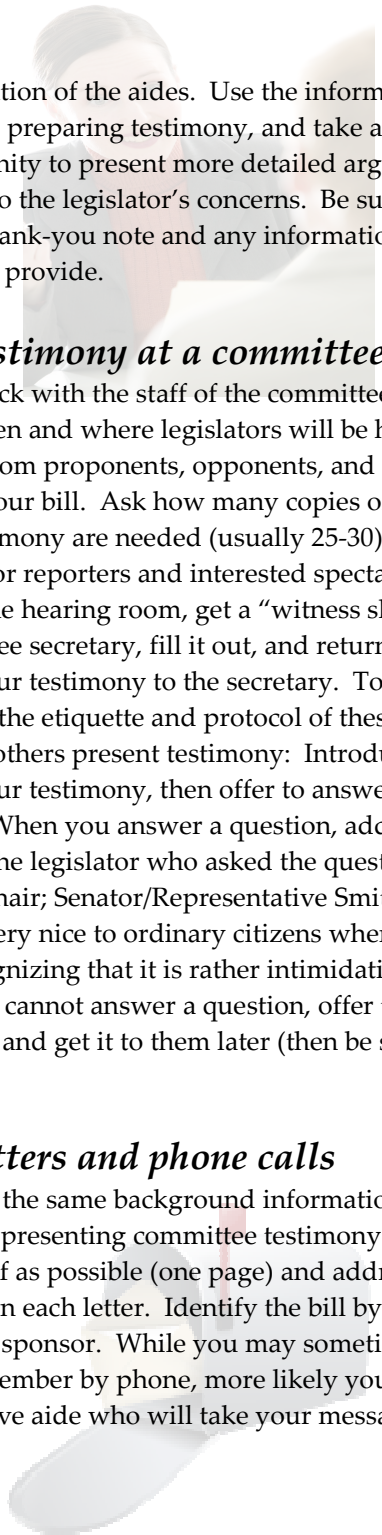
### **Effective Date**

A bill that has been passed by both houses and signed by the governor – or allowed to become a law without the governor’s signature – takes effect 90 days after it has been enacted. Some exceptions exist. Bills that go into effect immediately include taxes, appropriations for current expenses, and emergency legislation (“necessary for immediate peace, health, or safety of Ohio citizens”).

## Useful Questions

Now that you know how to read a bill, take a look at a piece of legislation that interests or affects you. It is helpful to have some specific questions in mind as you consider the bill:

- What is its purpose? Is it clear?*
- Will the bill – as written – improve, change, alleviate, solve, or create a problem?*
- What changes are proposed?*
- Are they necessary? Desirable?*
- Who will be affected? How?*
- Who will implement the changes?*
- What are the costs? Where will the money come from?*
- Is the bill logically organized?*
- Are there better solutions that should be considered? If so, what changes should be made to the bill?*



and information of the aides. Use the information you collected for preparing testimony, and take advantage of the opportunity to present more detailed arguments and to respond to the legislator’s concerns. Be sure to follow up with a thank-you note and any information that you promised to provide.

### **Testimony at a committee hearing**

Check with the staff of the committee chair to find out when and where legislators will be hearing testimony from proponents, opponents, and interested parties on your bill. Ask how many copies of your written testimony are needed (usually 25-30) and take a few extras for reporters and interested spectators. When you reach the hearing room, get a “witness slip” from the committee secretary, fill it out, and return it with the copies of your testimony to the secretary. To understand the etiquette and protocol of these hearings, watch how others present testimony: Introduce yourself and read your testimony, then offer to answer any questions. When you answer a question, address the chair, then the legislator who asked the question (“Mr. /Madame Chair; Senator/Representative Smith”). They tend to be very nice to ordinary citizens when they testify, recognizing that it is rather intimidating the first time. If you cannot answer a question, offer to get the information and get it to them later (then be sure to do so!).

### **Letters and phone calls**

Use the same background information you put together for presenting committee testimony. Keep the letter as brief as possible (one page) and address only one subject in each letter. Identify the bill by number, subject, and sponsor. While you may sometimes be able to reach a member by phone, more likely you will speak to a legislative aide who will take your message.

## *Ways to Communicate with Policy Makers*

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Legislators are confronted with a staggering array of governmental problems. They don't have the time or expertise to respond to all the issues they encounter. Legislative solutions are offered by special interest groups, administrative agencies, or citizens concerned with a problem. With approximately 2,000 bills introduced each session, legislators need the opinions, advice, and specialized knowledge of citizen lobbyists to help guide them.

Using some of the answers to the questions you asked above, marshal the facts supporting your arguments so that you can present convincing reasons for your positions and opinions. There are several ways to give your opinion to lawmakers, some more effective than others. In general, the more personal – and personalized – the communication, the more effective it will be.

### **Most Effective ways To Communicate**

#### ***Face-to-face meetings***

Whether you want to meet with your legislator in the Statehouse office or back in the home district, be sure to phone for an appointment. Legislators are very busy when they are in Columbus during session (usually Tuesday through Thursday), so you may have better luck in the district. You may be asked to meet with the legislator's aide; legislators pay attention to the advice

## *Legislative Services & Tools*

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#### ***Legislative Information Office***

The office provides toll free phone information on schedules of floor sessions, committee hearings, status of bills and will transmit brief messages to legislators including requests for legislators to return your call: 1-800-282-0253.

#### ***Legislative Service Commission***

Staffs legislative committees, drafts bills, prepares bill analysis, conducts research projects, follows federal government agency developments, maintains a legislative research library, prepares summaries of enacted legislation, codifies administrative regulations, and keeps bills of past legislatures on file.

#### ***Clerks of the House and Senate***

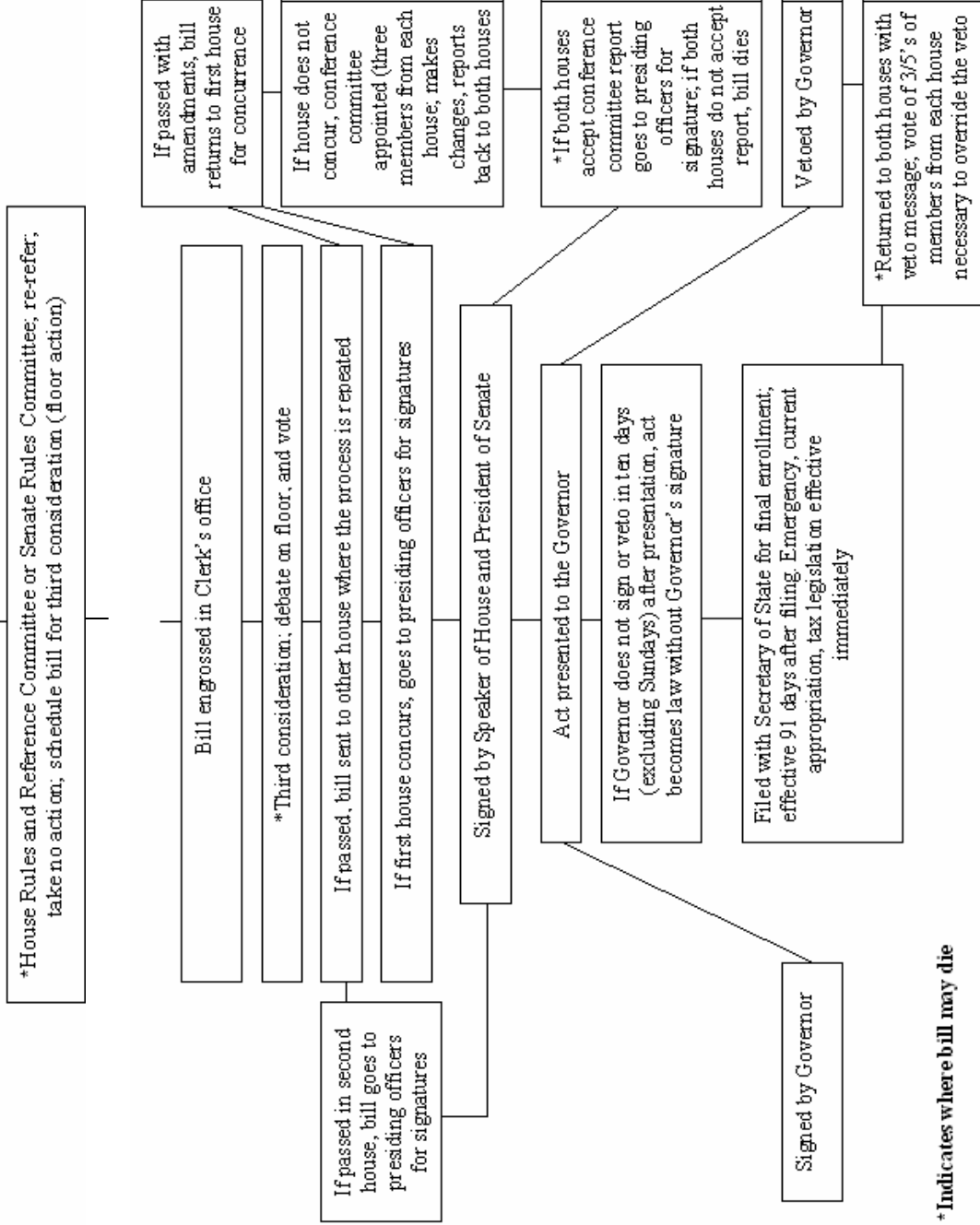
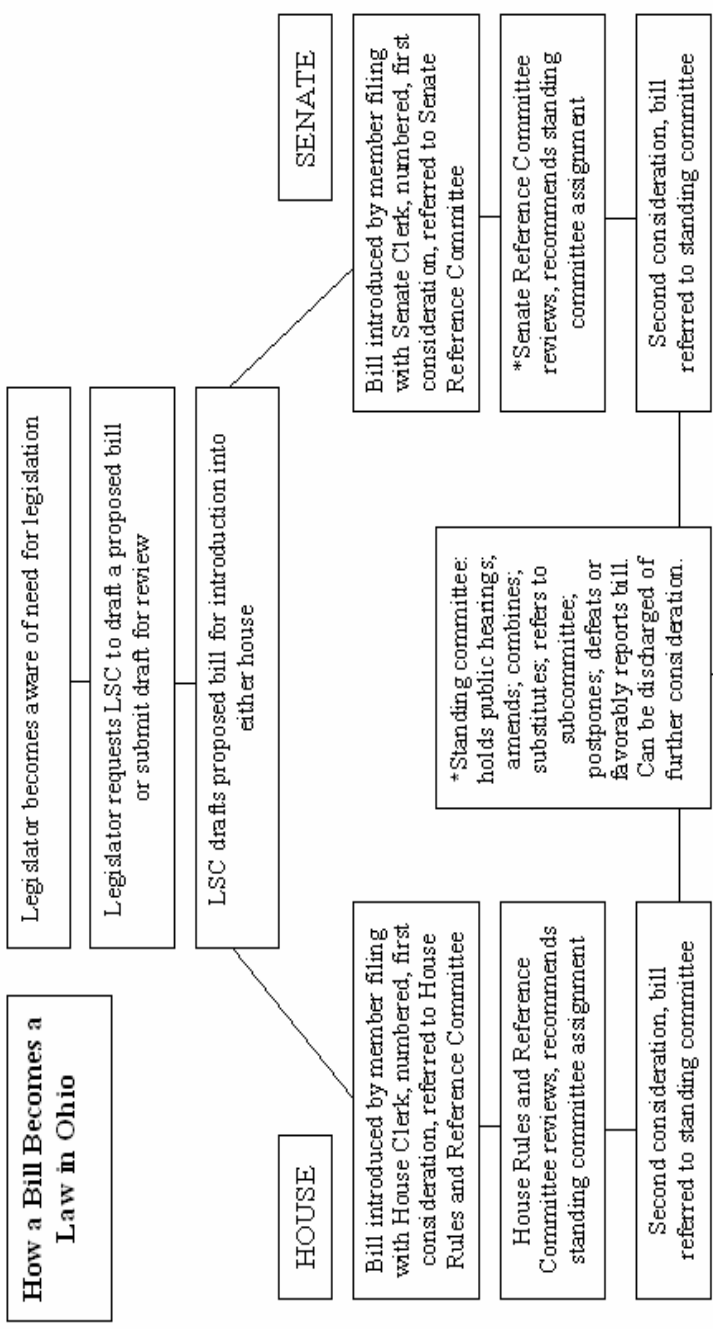
Keep a daily journal of proceedings. They maintain a record of copies of all bills and resolutions introduced and post hearing schedules.

#### ***Committee Hearing Schedules***

They are available from the Clerks' offices and posted at the back of the Senate chamber and in the hall next to the Clerks' office. Time, place and numbers of bills to be heard are listed.

#### ***Journal***

A summary of floor action including voting records of the House and Senate for each day.



\* Indicates where bill may die