

Legislative Process

Stay informed about issues being considered by law-making bodies

At every level of government, it has never been easier to follow along, thanks to the internet and open government practices that provide transparency to the public.

At the local level, check your town's website. You may find recorded meetings and written meeting minutes from all law-making bodies. You can often find copies of the materials presented in meetings and even those coming up for discussion in a future meeting. Don't see what you're looking for? Reach out to your Town Hall for guidance.

At the state level, Connecticut's General Assembly has a one-stop shop website: CGA.CT.gov spend some time exploring the information you may find there. Just a few examples: which legislators sit on each committee, which bills are open for public hearing each week, how to submit testimony, Connecticut's statutes, which bills have been passed out of committee, committee YouTube channels, every bill written in plain language, and how legislators voted.

At the federal level, visit congress.gov for all you need to know, including current legislative activities of the Senate and House of Representatives.

Learn the terminology of the legislative body

Just like any other job, municipal, state, and federal legislative bodies have their own industry-specific language. Learning the language will help you navigate the system! From Caucus to Joint Favorable to Fiscal Note, see our glossary at Civics101.CT.gov to learn the lingo!

Understand people's stance in the legislative body as it relates to your issue

All voters have municipal, state, and federal representation based on their address. But did you know you can contact other representatives to fight for or against a law? Take the time to understand which representatives share your viewpoints and be in touch with them. You may be able to help one another!

Research and learn perspectives on issues that differ from your own

The best way to advocate for a policy you believe in is to understand all aspects of the issue. Learn why people in Connecticut or other places are for or against your issue. Doing your research will allow you to have more productive conversations with lawmakers.

Learn how to read a bill

Most laws piggyback on existing laws. For example, lawmakers may seek to add \$5 to a fine for litterers. That bill would use the existing litter law language, and only change the fine amount by \$5. Save yourself time by understanding how to find only the changing text. Read through a few bills to get some practice. It's not as hard to read a bill as it looks at first!

In the Connecticut state legislature, proposed deletions in a bill are in brackets, and all proposed additions are underlined. Totally new sections are marked as "ne

At the Federal level, anything being added to an existing bill will appear between quotation marks (" "). People will sometimes refer to what is "inside the quotes" or "outside the quotes" to distinguish between what's new and what already exists.



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Submit testimony in support of an issue being considered

If a topic is up for conversation in the legislature, be sure to let your representatives know what you like. Most people elect representatives who share their values and trust that person to vote the “right” way. However, representatives need your help to protect the laws you care about and fight against changes to existing laws you support. Simply because a law was passed one year ago does not mean that it is not under threat of being repealed in future years.

Most legislative bodies must make the bills that are being considered for passage available to the public, and they will let you know how the public can weigh in. However, the rest is up to you! You will need to check meeting agendas and postings to ensure you know the deadlines for telling lawmakers how you feel about a potential law. Read the bill. Many bills are tens or even hundreds of pages long. It is most helpful to say which parts you like (e.g., Sections 3-5 or lines 29-35).

Whether at the local, state, or federal level, there are many ways to testify to support proposed laws. You may provide your testimony via postal mail, email, in-person, or virtually.

Local: Check your town’s website

State: Go to CGA.CT.gov, go to the Citizens Guide section, and click on “Testifying at a Public Hearing.”

Federal: To testify before Congress, you must be invited. Typically, people asked to testify are experts on a certain topic and are known to the committee or are recommended by members of the committee (the Congressmen on the committee or their staff)

If you missed the testimony window, you may still make your voice heard by contacting lawmakers or contacting your representatives directly.

Submit testimony against an issue being considered

Most legislative bodies must make available to the public bills that are being considered for passage and will let you know how the public can weigh in. However, the rest is up to you! You will need to check meeting agendas and postings to be sure you know the deadlines for telling lawmakers how you feel about a potential law.

You may find that you like one part and dislike another part. It will be more helpful to lawmakers if you are specific (e.g., I like the concept but do not like Section 3 or I dislike Line 35)! Read the bill. Many bills are tens or even hundreds of pages long. You may find that there are elements that should be kept, others amended slightly, and still others totally eliminated. It is most helpful to lawmakers for you to say which parts you dislike.

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Legislative Process

Learn the calendar and the decision-making process

Members of the public are sometimes disappointed to learn that it is too late in the process to have an impact. Too many people wait until they hear about an issue in the news to reach out to legislators, and by the time it is newsworthy, it can be too late in the process. Understanding the calendar and the decision-making process will allow your voice to be heard most effectively. Check your local, state, and federal websites for detailed information. Questions to ask include:

When is the legislative body in session? (e.g., are they off during the summer)

By what date must legislators submit ideas for bills?

Once a bill is submitted, **what is the process** for input and decision-making?

Once a bill passes a committee, **what are the steps** to ensure it receives a vote?

What are the deadlines for certain decisions?

Learn the budget process

Budgets are set differently at the local, state, and federal levels.

At the local level, check your town's website to determine when and how your local budget is decided. Many towns hold budget referendum elections when members of the public cast a vote. Sometimes, fewer than 100 people show up to say how the town should spend its money.

Connecticut uses a biennial budget process—a two-year budget cycle. The appropriations committee, the finance, revenue and bonding committee, and the Office of the Governor all have a role in creating the budget. In odd-numbered years, the General Assembly adopts budgets for the next two fiscal years. In even-numbered years, the Governor reports on the status of the budget and makes recommendations for adjustments if needed. To learn more about the budget process and timeline, visit Civics101.CT.gov.

At the federal level, the House and Senate create their own budget resolutions, which must be negotiated and merged. Congress sends the approved funding bills to the President to sign or veto. Learn more at USA.gov/federal-budget-process.



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Meet with key decision-makers (committee chairs, caucus leaders, etc.)

It is just as important to know how legislative bodies are organized as it is to know your own representatives. They may be your voice, but legislative bodies have leaders who work to balance out all the voices. Sometimes, you may wish to contact these leaders to let them know what is important to your town, region, or state.

Each lawmaking body is different, so spend time learning who is who. Below, you'll find some key positions to research.

Local Level: (every town is different, but some positions may include):

- Mayor or First Selectman
- Board of Aldermen or Selectmen
- Town Council or Representative Town Meeting

State Level:

- President Pro Tempore (in the Senate)
- Senate Majority Leader
- Senate Minority Leader
- Speaker of the House
- House Majority Leader
- House Minority Leader

Federal Level:

- President Pro Tempore (in the Senate)
- Senate Majority Leader
- Senate Minority Leader
- Speaker of the House
- House Republican Leader
- House Minority Leader



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