

The decisions made during the annual session of the Utah State Legislature have a lasting impact on our communities. As new laws are created and others repealed and rewritten, it is important to ensure that these changes strengthen rather than compromise our constitutional rights. During each session, and throughout the year, the ACLU of Utah addresses a wide range of issues, and our organizing and lobbying efforts are aimed at educating lawmakers and the public about the civil liberties implications of the proposed bills.

INCLUDED IN THIS GUIDE

UNDERSTANDING THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

BEING A CITIZEN LOBBYIST

CALLING YOUR LEGISLATOR

WRITING YOUR LEGISLATOR

PARTICIPATING IN COMMITTEE HEARINGS

WRITING LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Your elected officials are citizens of Utah, just like you.
- There is no wrong way to lobby if you stay on message.
- Practice what you want to say first. Practice with family and friends first.
- The goal is not to get legislators and other elected officials to like you, the goal is for them to see you as a member of their community.
- Everyone in a democratic society has the right to participate in government processes and require accountability from their elected official.
- No longer are you a spectator but a key player in the democratic process.
- Your voice matters and you have the tools, talents, and capabilities to address your concerns and expectations with your elected officials.



Utah State Capitol

CITIZEN LOBBYISTS ARE THE KEY

The citizen lobbyist has existed nearly as long as democratic government itself. The term "lobbying" originates from the early practice of attempting to influence legislators in the lobby outside of the legislative chambers before a vote. The function of any lobbyist or lobbying campaign is basically the same: Advocate, Educate, and Participate. Contrary to popular perception, lobbying does not need to be complicated or expensive.

People are often hesitant to get involved in the political process for several reasons: they believe legislators only listen to high-powered lobbyists and big donors, they don't think legislation will affect their lives directly, or they don't understand how the process works. But the single most important factor in influencing how a legislator votes on a bill is constituent support. And since very few people take the time to contact their legislators, one visit, one phone call, or one letter from a constituent speaks volumes.

To find information about specific bills, hearing schedules, and how to contact your legislator, visit the Utah Legislature website
www.le.utah.gov/

UNDERSTANDING THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

Without a doubt, the most important tactic for monitoring the legislature is to understand how it works. In Utah, the House holds 75 members, and the Senate holds 29 members. The legislature meets for 45 day beginning on the fourth Monday in January. During this time the legislature operates what is called an open legislative process where all committee action on bills and amendments is conducted in open session. This gives citizens the opportunity to attend committee meetings and House and Senate floor sessions. The bills are read three times in both the House and Senate.

The introduction of a bill is its first reading. Once a bill has been introduced in the House or Senate, it is referred to a Rules Committee. There a recommendation is made for standing committee assignment, and the presiding officer - President in the Senate, Speaker in the House - assigns the bill to the appropriate standing committee. Standing committees offer citizens the opportunity to listen to and comment on legislative issues. If a citizen is interested in a particular bill, they may contact the chair of a specific standing committee to schedule their testimony. They can also attend committee meetings and testify when the chair asks for comments from the public.

The standing committee chairman determines when a bill is to be scheduled for a hearing. In the House, acceptance of the standing committee report - rather than debate and vote - is considered the second reading of the bill. In the Senate, bills are debated and a vote is taken on the second reading. When a bill passes the second reading in either House or Senate, it is placed at the bottom of the third reading calendar and cannot be considered until

the following day except under suspension of rules. The bill is then read a third time and debated before passage by a constitutional majority - 38 votes in the House and 15 votes in the Senate.

The bills are then sent to the Governor for signing or veto.



BEING A CITIZEN LOBBYIST

Utah legislators generally have offices in the state capitol. Some officials are accessible to the community at their home or work and some prefer that their constituents contact them at the state capitol. During the legislative session, state officials spend most of their time at the capitol and are easily accessible by internet or by phone.

Elected officials spend a lot of time and money to measure public opinion in their districts. They count votes, count contributions to their campaigns, and they also count phone calls, emails, letters, and personal visits.

Most elected officials emphasize constituent contact because it helps direct their voting behavior. Even if your public official is supportive on our issues, you should still call, visit or write, since they will hear the other side too. They also need to hear that an issue is important to our community.

Elected Officials want to know:

- Which constituents support or do not support an issue
- How many constituents support or do not support an issue
- Why their constituents support or do not support an issue
- How an issue impacts the constituents in their district

CALL YOUR LEGISLATOR

Each legislator lists contact information so that you can call them either at their office, at the state capitol or at home. Legislators pay attention to phone calls which are either FOR or AGAINST an issue.

The Phone Call

- Phone calls are most useful when a vote has been scheduled and there isn't time for a letter or visit.
- Phone calls will most likely be received by office staff who will then pass your message on to the legislator.
- Give your name and address to verify that you live in the elected officials district.
- Cover one subject/topic per call.
- Keep your phone call short and simple:

"I support (bill name/number), because (list 2-3 bullet points), and I urge (legislator's name) to vote for this bill."

"I do not support (bill name/number), because (list 2-3 bullet points), and I urge (legislator's name) to vote against this bill."

- If you are calling to request information about the legislator's position, your call will likely be transferred to the staff person/intern working with the legislator. If the staff person doesn't know the position, ask them to find out and get back to you.

"I am interested in finding out (legislators name) position on (bill name/number), could you please get that information for me and call or email me back? Thank you."

- If the issue isn't pending, it is still important to be brief and concise in your conversation. Be prepared to state your position, what you want the legislator to do, and be ready to back up your position with one or two supporting arguments.

"I understand that (bill name/number) might be introduced during this legislative session. I support (bill name/number), because (list 2-3 bullet points), and I urge (legislator's name) to vote for this bill."

"I understand that (bill name/number) might be introduced during this legislative session. I do not support (bill name/number), because (list 2-3 bullet points), and I urge (legislator's name) to vote against this bill."

WRITING LETTERS AND EMAILS



As constituents, it is important to stay in written contact with your elected officials. Elected officials use letters as one way to measure public opinion in their district.

Their offices count the pieces of mail and email FOR and AGAINST every issue.

Tips for Writing

- State your name, that you are the elected officials constituent, your position and exactly what you want the legislator to do in your first paragraph.
- Cover ONE subject per letter; write more than one letter if you have multiple issues.
- If the issue can be identified by bill name & number, include it.
- Describe the legislation and how it affects you. Tell your own experiences, elected officials do want to know how a bill or proposal will affect the lives of their constituents.
- Have clear talking points. Check the ACLU of Utah website or call our office. Often we will be able to supply you with these.
- If you know the position taken by your legislative representative, include it as this demonstrates to the legislator that you are serious and are keeping a close watch on the progress of the bill. You can find this information by looking at the committee section of www.le.state.ut.us.
- Request a reply, you are more likely to receive a reply if you ask for one.
- If you receive a reply that supports your position, write back and thank your elected official.
- If you receive a reply that does not support your position, write and explain your position again to the elected official, help them better understand your concerns.
- Always thank the elected official for their time in responding to you.

YOUR PARTICIPATION IN COMMITTEE HEARINGS MAKES AN IMPACT

Committee meetings are open to the public and they can be a forum for citizens to express their views.

Public testimony can influence the committee's action and can become a part of the permanent record.

Agendas are posted 24 hours in advance of the meetings outside the committee rooms in the West building. They can also be found at the legislative home page at www.le.state.ut.us.

Be Familiar with the Committee Process

- Know the meeting time and location, these can be found on the agenda.
- Be flexible—assume the meeting will take longer than the scheduled time.
- Before arriving to the meeting, check to make sure that the issue you are following has not been removed from the agenda.
- The bill or issue that you are interested in may not be heard first, check the agenda for the committee meeting that you are planning on attending.
- If you can, attend another committee meeting before you testify so that you are familiar with the process and room layout.

Know the Issues

- Before you go to a public hearing, know the membership of the committee and find out how they may be predisposed to the issue you will be discussing, know your allies in the room. You can find out how they have voted on similar issues by going to the legislative home page at www.le.state.ut.us.
- If you are part of a group, plan your speeches so that you do not duplicate each others' ideas. Strive to make one point without duplicating other speakers.
- Have knowledge about the "other side of the story." You may be asked questions about the differences.

Thanks to Equality Utah for permission to use some material from their guide
*"How to Talk With Your Elected Officials:
Being a Citizen Lobbyist"*

WRITING LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor are great advocacy tools. After you write letters to your elected official, sending letters to the editor can achieve other advocacy goals because they: reach a large audience; are often monitored by elected officials; can bring up information not addressed in a news article; create an impression of widespread support for or opposition to an issue.

Keep it short and on one subject. Many newspapers have strict limits on the length of letters and have limited space to publish them. Keeping your letter brief will help assure that your important points are not cut out by the newspaper. Use the "**TIPS FOR WRITING LETTER AND EMAIL**" as a guide.

Make it legible. Your letter doesn't have to be fancy, but you should use a typewriter or computer word processor if your handwriting is difficult to read.

Send letters to weekly community newspapers too. The smaller the newspaper's circulation, the easier it is to get your letter printed.

Be sure to include your contact information. Many newspapers will only print a letter to the editor after calling the author to verify his or her identity and address. Newspapers will not give out that information, and will usually only print your name and city should your letter be published.

Make references to the newspaper. While some papers print general commentary, many will only print letters that refer to a specific article. Here are some examples of easy ways to refer to articles in your opening sentence:

- I was disappointed to see that The Post's May 18 editorial "School Vouchers Are Right On" omitted some of the key facts in the debate.
- I strongly disagree with (author's name) narrow view on women's reproductive rights. ("Name of Op-Ed," date)
- I am deeply saddened to read that Congressman Doe is working to roll back affirmative action. ("Title of Article," date)

ACLU of Utah
355 North 300 West
Salt Lake City, UT 84103
Phone: (801) 521-9862 • Fax: (801) 532-2850
aclu@acluutah.org • www.acluutah.org