

USE YOUR VOICE AT THE LEGISLATURE



COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR LEGISLATORS



Let your elected officials know your concerns, and your position on issues that are important to you. Write a letter or email, or call their office. Here are a few tips!

When writing a letter or email...

- Be brief, clear, and to the point.
 - One or two pages max.
 - Write in your own words.
 - Be courteous.
- Explain your position and why it matters.
- Include your return address or contact information. If you write a letter, sign your name legibly or print it below your signature.

When speaking with a legislator...

- "KISS": Keep It Short and Simple.
 - Get to the point.
 - Respect the legislator's time.
 - Provide additional detail when asked. If you don't know, say so. Tell the truth and don't exaggerate.

SHARE AN IDEA FOR A NEW LAW



Legislators can help to translate your idea into a bill. Bills can be introduced during the legislative session (mid-January through early May). If the bill is successful, it will become an act of law.

You don't have to translate it into legal language, just summarize the problem (or the opportunity):

- List what you think the law should do.
- Bullet points may help. You want a legislator to quickly grasp what you're trying to say.
- If you have research, sources, or examples, let them know they are available.

Find a legislator who likes your idea. Start with...

- Representative and Senator who represents you
- Chair or member of relevant committee
- Members who have supported similar issues in past

ASK FOR A PUBLIC HEARING



Most bills never get a public hearing. If a bill doesn't get heard, it will miss upcoming deadlines and will "die in committee" (the fate of most bills). If you support a bill, ask the Chair of the committee the bill is in to schedule it for a hearing. Here are a few other tips:

When advocating for a bill in committee...

- Act fast. Deadlines come and go quickly.
- Get others to advocate for a hearing, too.
- You may want to approach other members of the committee to see if you can gather their support.
- If your bill fails to get heard, look for bills that are similar -- if they are being heard, use that opportunity to express your views and stimulate discussion.



TESTIFY!

If a bill gets scheduled for a hearing, you may have the opportunity to testify. This is when you can tell the committee your view on why the bill should become law (or shouldn't).

When preparing your testimony...

- Time is always short! (You may have less than 24 hours.)
- Try to get it in by the deadline. (If you missed the deadline but not the hearing, send it in anyway! It will be marked "late" but may still be considered by legislators and become part of the record.)
- Get others to testify, too!
- Whether you are submitting oral or written testimony, be sure to include your name, the bill number, and whether you support or oppose the bill at the beginning of your testimony.



REPEAT AS NECESSARY!

If you were in support of a bill and it passed out of committee, your work doesn't end there. Be ready to ask for the *next* hearing, find more people to come and help you testify, and gather legislative support for the final passage of your measure. And remember, having a bill become a law is not easy -- it may take years. An important part of advocacy is teaching the legislators about your issue and why the bill is vital.



CONTACT THE GOVERNOR

If your bill has made it all the way through the Legislature, it will be in the Governor's hands. Call his office, or use the webform available on his website, governor.hawaii.gov, to let him know if you'd like him to sign the bill into law. (If you're against the bill, you'd ask him to veto it.) As with all the other stages of the lawmaking process, there are deadlines -- so act quickly!



COMMUNICATE WITH LEGISLATORS

While it's *always* appropriate to communicate with your legislators, during the interim they'll usually have more time! The interim -- May through mid-January -- is the time between legislative sessions. So, if you supported a bill or an issue during session and it was less than successful, the interim is a great time to meet with legislators and allies to discuss ways to proceed. Then you'll be ready when session starts up again in January.



LEARN MORE ABOUT THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS AND HOW TO BE INVOLVED

The Public Access Room (PAR) can help you learn more about how to advocate for bills and particular issues at the legislature. We can also teach you about the wonderful tools available on the legislature's website -- you can keep track of bills, easily find lists and reports, sign up for hearing notices, and much more. Additionally, we can help you understand the dynamics of how things are accomplished at the legislature. Give us a call or email us -- we're always happy to help!

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TO FIND YOUR LEGISLATORS, HEARINGS, AND BILLS:

Legislature's website: capitol.hawaii.gov

FOR LISTS OF LEGISLATORS, INFORMATION SHEETS, AND TEACHING TOOLS:

Public Access Room (PAR) website: LRBhawaii.org/PAR

TO ASK QUESTIONS, GET MORE INFORMATION, OR TO SCHEDULE A WORKSHOP:

Contact PAR

Phone: 587-0478 Email: par@capitol.hawaii.gov