



Family Care Council

LEGISLATIVE TOOL KIT

educate and empower _____



Family Care Council Florida

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH A LEGISLATOR

As a Floridian, one of your greatest responsibilities is to help elect the legislators who represent you and the state's more than 14 million other residents. But your role in the democratic process of government does not end at the polls. By sharing your opinions and ideas with your Representatives and Senators in Tallahassee, you help them decide what to do about the issues and pending legislation that affect us all. They value your suggestions and encourage you to express them.

Your legislators receive a huge amount of phone calls and mail from their constituents. Unfortunately, their full agendas limit their ability to personally respond to them all. How, then, can you be sure your voice is heard? Here are some tips to help you get the most impact out of your communications with your legislators in Tallahassee.

GENERAL TIPS

Know who your legislators are and how to contact them. If you aren't sure who represents your community, you can find out by using the Find Your Legislator tool. Your Senator's flsenate.gov page will give you his or her mailing addresses, phone numbers, social media links, and email address.

Review how the legislative process works. Understanding how an idea becomes a law will help you effectively express your own ideas.

Contact your legislator about a particular issue before the Legislature takes action on it. If you are unsure where an issue is in the process, you can visit <http://flsenate.gov/Session/Bills> to find a bill's next stop.

Use a variety of communication methods. You might choose to contact your legislator by phone, letter, email, fax, social media, or visiting in person.

Another great way to spread your message is to give testimony at public hearings held by the Legislature. To give testimony, you need to contact the appropriate committee administrative assistant to sign up. You can visit to fill out an appearance card, or do so in person at the committee meeting.

Be concise, yet specific. Tell your legislator what effect you think a particular issue or bill, if it becomes law, will have on you, your children, business, or community. Also, suggest a course of action and offer assistance.

The Legislature is an institution where people on opposite sides of issues have an opportunity to engage in thoughtful debate. Therefore, it is important to be polite, even if you disagree strongly with the legislator you are addressing.



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WRITING EFFECTIVE LETTERS

Address letters to members of the Legislature as follows:

The Honorable John Doe

State Senator, District #

The Capitol

Tallahassee, FL 32399-1100

Use the right address and spell your legislator's name correctly. Type or print legibly. Sign your name neatly and give your address correctly so the legislator can respond to your letter.

Keep letters, email, and faxes as brief as possible. Concisely written correspondence is more likely to grab and keep the reader's attention.

Identify your issue or opinion at the beginning of the letter; don't bury your main point.

Cover only one issue per letter. If you have another issue to address, write another letter.

Back up your opinions with supporting facts. Your letter should inform the reader, and facts make an argument more tangible and convincing.

Avoid abbreviations or acronyms, and don't use technical jargon.

Don't send the same letter to more than one legislator. Personalized letters have a greater impact.

CALLING OR VISITING YOUR LEGISLATOR

Plan your call or visit ahead of time. When preparing to visit your legislator, make an appointment.

Call or write to schedule the meeting as soon as you know when you are going to be at the Capitol. This way you can be sure you will be able to meet with your legislator.

Keep to the point and discuss only one issue. Organizing your thoughts ahead of time and making notes to help you stay on track can be very helpful.

Prepare a one-page fact sheet concerning your issue to give to your legislator. This will help him or her better retain what you present.

<https://www.flsenate.gov/About/EffectiveCommunication>



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HOW A BILL BECOMES A FLORIDA LAW

The Florida Legislature meets once a year for 60 days to address the needs of our state. With a population of more than 21.3 million (2018) people, there is much that must be discussed in our annual legislative session.

Bills are filed by Representatives and Senators for consideration during the session.

When a bill is filed, it is referred to several committees to be reviewed by smaller groups of members. Through the committee process, the bill is discussed and debated and amendments or changes can be added to the bill. This process allows the idea to be thoroughly discussed and debated by the legislators, the public and those specific people who the bill will affect. After passing out of committees the bill is brought before the entire chamber of the House and Senate.

Committees have several options when considering a bill. They can approve the bill. They can defeat the bill. Or they can choose to amend the bill. If a bill is defeated in committee, that idea is dead for the rest of session.

Once the bill has passed each of the committees to which it is assigned, it is available to be voted on by the entire body of members. A bill passes by receiving a majority of the votes in that chamber. Each bill must be passed by both chambers before it becomes a law.

If both chambers approve the bill, it goes to the Governor's office for his consideration. The Governor can sign the bill, allow it to become a law without his signature or veto the bill. If the Governor chooses to veto a bill, the Legislature can overturn the next time they meet by a two thirds vote of both chambers.

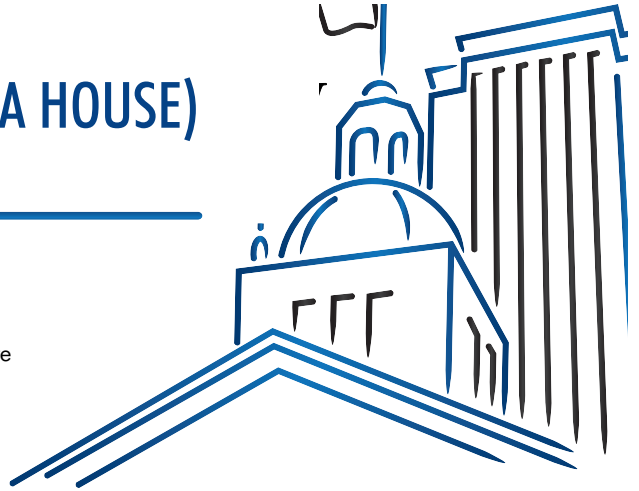
If a bill doesn't make it all the way through this process before the end of session, that bill dies and must begin the process anew the next year.

<https://www.flfamily.org/issues-research/legislative-update/how-a-bill-becomes-a-florida-law>



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HOW AN IDEA BECOMES A LAW (FLORIDA HOUSE)



Idea

A citizen, group, or legislator has an idea for a new law. A Representative then decides that the idea should be a bill.



House Bill Drafted

The Representative (also called a member) contacts House Bill Drafting Services and requests a bill to be drafted. The member may provide very detailed instructions or just the general idea. A staff member, called a "bill drafter," will work with the member and his or her staff until the member is satisfied and a final draft is approved. Once approved, the idea receives a bill number (odd numbers only in the House) and is called a bill for the first time.



1st Reading is by Publication in the House Journal

In accordance with Article III of the Florida Constitution, all bills must be read three times before being voted on. The 1st Reading is by publication of the bill number, its sponsor, and a short one paragraph description of the bill, called a title, in the House Journal. The Speaker will also refer the bill to one or more committees or subcommittees in the House. Committees and subcommittees are groups of members appointed to review specific areas of government such as education, criminal justice, and agriculture, to name a few.



House Committee or Subcommittee Meeting

Once a bill is referred to a committee or subcommittee, it is reviewed for inclusion on an agenda. The Chair of the committee or subcommittee will decide which bills should be heard. In 2010, of the 843 general bills filed, 488 "died" in a council or committee, never being heard. Once a bill has been heard and voted favorably by all of its committees or subcommittees, it is placed on a House Calendar signifying that it is available for 2nd Reading.



2nd Reading on the Floor is by consideration of the Special Order Calendar

Once a bill is on the House Calendar, that does not mean that the bill will be heard on the floor. The House has a special committee called the Rules & Calendar Committee that will determine when and if a bill will be sent to the floor for 2nd Reading. These bills are placed on a recommended Special Order Calendar. Each Special Order Calendar is voted on prior to the House considering those bills on a specific legislative day. Once a bill has been introduced and read on the Special Order Calendar, it is explained, questions are answered about the bill, and amendments are considered. This constitutes a bill's 2nd Reading.



3rd Reading on the House Floor by consideration of the Third Reading Calendar

After a bill has been read a second time on the Special Order Calendar, it is taken up on 3rd Reading, generally, on a subsequent legislative day. This is the final reading of the bill prior to being voted on. Once a bill's title has been read a third time, it is explained again, questions are again permitted, and amendments may be offered; at this point, amendments may only be considered by a 2/3 vote. The final action is for debate on the bill prior to the sponsor making a closing statement. The bill is then voted on by the members of the House. Any bill not receiving a favorable vote "dies" on the floor.





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HOW AN IDEA BECOMES A LAW (FLORIDA HOUSE)



Senate Consideration

Once the bill is passed by the House, it is sent to the Senate with a "message." The Senate's process varies slightly from the House's process. The Senate may vote to pass the bill without amendments and return the bill to the House, refer the bill to a committee for consideration, or defeat the bill on the Senate floor. The Senate may decide to further amend the bill and pass it. If this happens, the bill is returned to the House.



Return to the House

If the House has received a House bill having been passed by the Senate without amendments, it puts the bill in its final form called an "enrolled" version. The enrolled version of the bill is then sent to the Governor for consideration. If the Senate has further amended the House bill, it is returned to the House for consideration of the Senate amendments. This "back and forth" consideration of the bill is an attempt to perfect the bill's language by working out the differences, but generally ends after several exchanges by each side. At any time, either the Senate or the House may decide to abandon the effort of reaching a compromise and the bill dies. If the issue is important enough, however, the House and Senate may agree to appoint a conference committee comprised of Representatives and Senators to work out the details of the bill.



Consideration by the Governor

Generally, if the Legislature is in session and has sent the Governor a bill, he/she has seven days to consider the bill while the Legislature remains in session. If the bill is received after the Legislature has adjourned "sine die" (the 60-day session has ended), the Governor has 15 days to consider the bill. The Governor may take one of three actions: sign the bill into law, allow the bill to become law without his/her signature, or veto the bill. If the Governor vetoes the bill, the Legislature may override his/her veto by a 2/3 vote of the Legislature during the next Session.

KEY POINT...

At any point of consideration, the bill may "die" for that legislative session, which means it will no longer be considered.

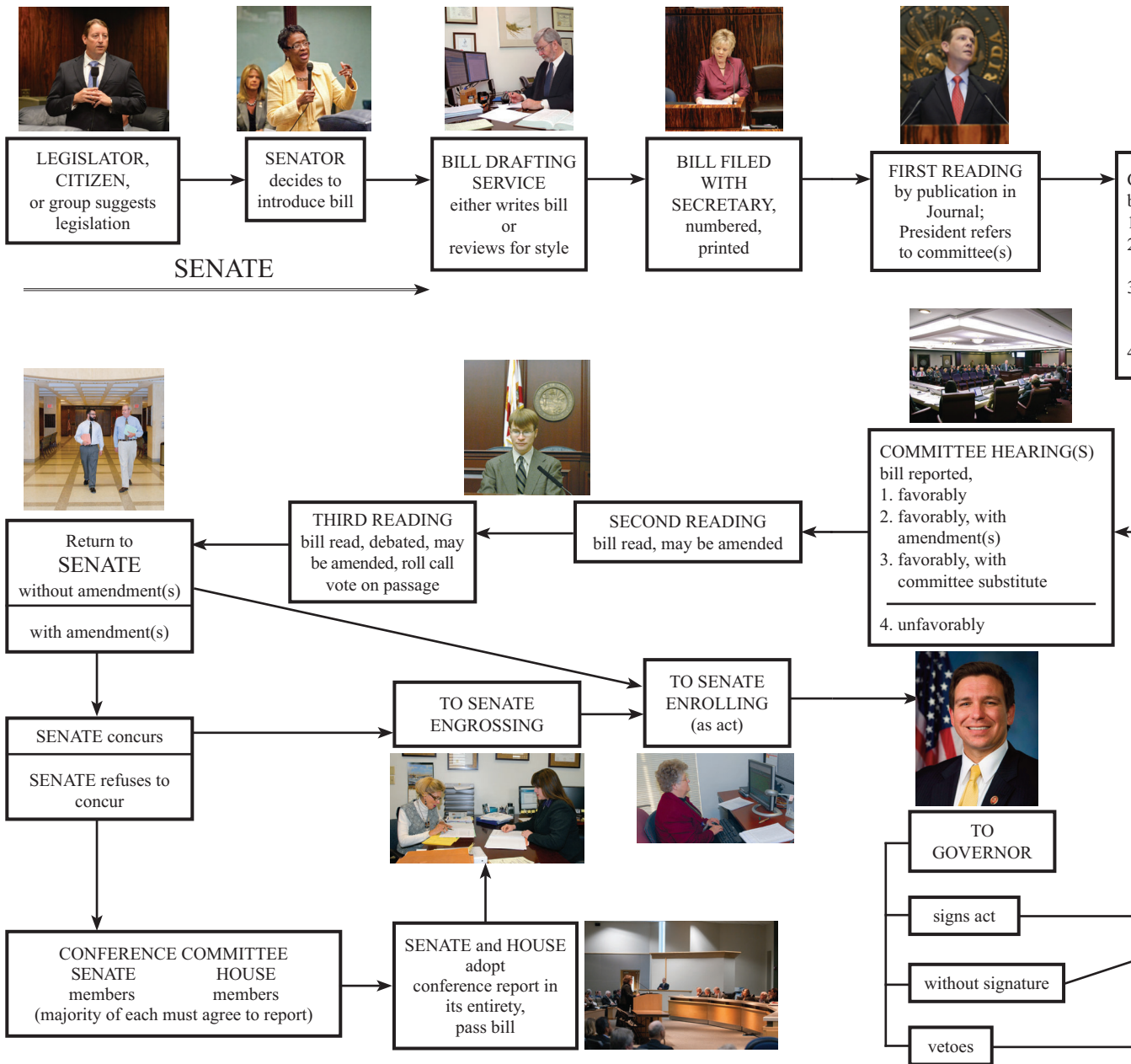


PRODUCED AND PUBLISHED BY
THE OFFICE OF THE CLERK
FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
8/14/2012



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HOW AN IDEA BECOMES A LAW (FLORIDA SENATE)

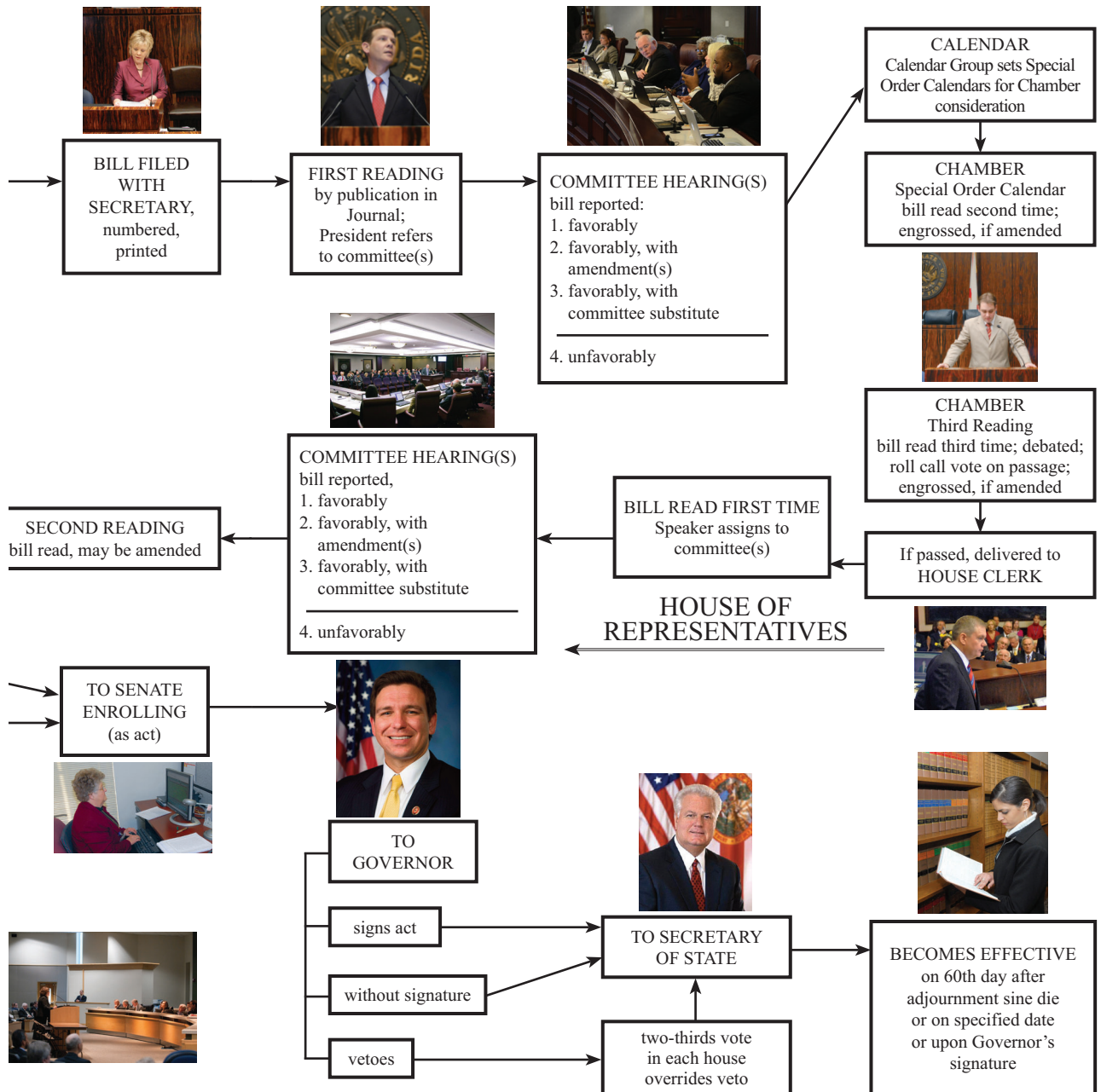


A simplified chart showing the route many bills take through the Florida Legislature. Bills may originate in either house. This bill originated in the Senate.



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HOW AN IDEA BECOMES A LAW (FLORIDA SENATE)



Prepared by the Office of the Secretary of the Senate



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GET TO KNOW YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

Go to <https://www.flgov.com/meet-governor-desantis/>

Governor: _____

Representative: _____

Party: _____

Capitol address with phone: _____

District office with phone and e-mail: _____

Committee Assignments: _____

Bio Info: _____

Common Interests: (from same state, same hobby, has a DD individual in family, on boards for DD individuals)

Picture: _____

Website: _____

Name of Aides: _____

Notes: _____



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GET TO KNOW YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

Go to <https://www.flsenate.gov/senators/find>

Put in your address. Hit enter.

Florida Senate: _____

Representative: _____

Party: _____

Capitol address with phone: _____

District office with phone and e-mail: _____

Committee Assignments: _____

Bio Info: _____

Common Interests: (from same state, same hobby, has a DD individual in family, on boards for DD individuals)

Picture: _____

Website: _____

Name of Aides: _____

Notes: _____



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GET TO KNOW YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

Go to <https://www.myfloridahouse.gov/Sections/Representatives/myrepresentative.aspx>
Put in your address. Hit enter.

Florida House: _____

Representative: _____

Party: _____

Capitol address with phone: _____

District office with phone and e-mail: _____

Committee Assignments: _____

Bio Info: _____

Common Interests: (from same state, same hobby, has a DD individual in family, on boards for DD individuals)

Picture: _____

Website: _____

Name of Aides: _____

Notes: _____



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GET TO KNOW YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

Go to <https://www.senate.gov/senators/index.htm>

U.S. Senate _____

Representative: _____

Party: _____

Capitol address with phone: _____

District office with phone and e-mail: _____

Committee Assignments: _____

Bio Info: _____

Common Interests: (from same state, same hobby, has a DD individual in family, on boards for DD individuals)

Picture: _____

Website: _____

Name of Aides: _____

Notes: _____



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GET TO KNOW YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

Go to <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>
Put in your zip code. Hit enter.

U.S. House: _____

Representative: _____

Party: _____

Capitol address with phone: _____

District office with phone and e-mail: _____

Committee Assignments: _____

Bio Info: _____

Common Interests: (from same state, same hobby, has a DD individual in family, on boards for DD individuals)

Picture: _____

Website: _____

Name of Aides: _____

Notes: _____
