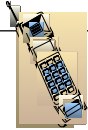


Getting in Contact

To find out the name of your state senator, call your city or town hall (phone numbers are in the blue pages of the phone book) or visit the Connecticut General Assembly's web site at www.cga.state.ct.us



To Call Your Legislator at the Capitol:

House Democrats	1-800-842-8267
House Republicans	1-800-842-8270
Senate Democrats	1-800-842-1420
Senate Republicans	1-800-842-1421
Governor's Office	1-800-406-1527

To E-mail Your Legislator:

House Democrats: first name.lastname @po.state.ct.us
Example: (Jack Thompson) jack.thompson@po.state.ct.us



House Republicans: first name.last name @housegop.state.ct.us
Example (Brian Flaherty): brian.flaherty@housegop.state.ct.us

Senate Democrats: last name@senatedems.state.ct.us
Example (Gary LeBeau): Lebeau@senatedems.state.ct.us

Senate Republicans: first name.lastname@po.state.ct.us
Example (Win Smith): Win.Smith@po.state.ct.us

(or call the numbers above or visit the website below to get the e-mail address)

On the Internet!



Connecticut General Assembly's home page:

www.cga.state.ct.us

Here you will find information on the schedule at the LOB, what's happening to bills, copies of bills, legislators phone numbers at home & at the capitol, hot issues, general information on the LOB, & more.

How to Get Your Legislator to Listen

A Guide To Taking Charge



C A B H N

The Connecticut Alliance for Basic Human Needs (CABHN) is a statewide network of advocates, grassroots organizations, social service providers, and religious organizations. The group was formed to support and promote advocacy on welfare-related programs. CABHN's goal is to encourage information sharing to help maximize energy and resources. To learn more about how to get involved, please call (860) 278-5688, ext. 12.

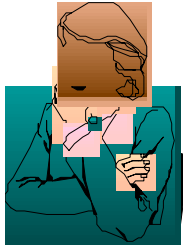
*Funded under a grant from the Welfare Redesign Pool
(Center for Community Change, Center on Budget & Policy Priorities
and Center for Law & Social Policy)*

Angry about program changes?

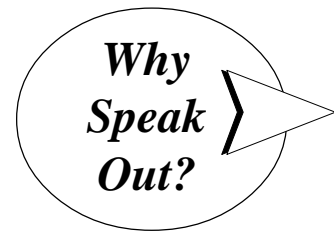
Think no one will listen to you?

Not sure what to say or how to say it?

Feel that you can't make a difference?



Well, you can make a difference-- and we'll show you how.



Speaking out about issues is one of the most important things a person can do. Unfortunately, not enough people do it. There are a lot of reasons people don't speak out on issues.

Here are some reasons that people don't try:

Myth: It takes too much time

FACT: You control how much or how little time you spend on making a difference (advocacy). If you have time to make a phone call, you have enough time making a difference. There are a lot of other things you can do from writing letters to going to the Capitol. It's up to you.

Myth: Advocates need to be experts

FACT: You don't have to be an "expert" and you don't need to be a "professional". Don't worry...legislators are not the experts... you can talk to them. They need and want to hear from "real people" (yes, YOU!) about what's happening to YOU.

Myth: No one will listen to me

FACT: People think that their voices won't be heard by elected officials. But *your silence speaks for you*. Your silence says you agree with what they are doing. Do you *really* agree? When you say nothing, legislators assume that everything is OK. If you speak out, they know that people are watching...even if they don't do what you want.

Myth: Advocates need training

FACT: If you have spoken up for your child at school, served on a committee at church, or helped organize a block party, you have the skills you need to be an advocate. The most important thing you can do is share your own experiences, knowledge and concerns.

All it takes to get started is you and your friends deciding to speak up and be heard. Getting your legislator's attention is not as difficult as you might think. Try it! You can do something from your home, in your community, or at the Capitol. You don't have to do all of the ideas we will give you...even ONE CALL HELPS! It just depends on how involved you want to get.



"You may never know what results come from your action. But if you do nothing, there will be no results."

--Gandhi

*You decide...
it's up to you!*

MAKING A DIFFERENCE--TOGETHER:

Getting Started.....

Think about your message

As you start, think about what it is you want and the best way to explain it. Consider how your message will sound to others and the most effective way to win support. Be focused and clear.



Talk to your friends

You don't need a huge rally or a thousand people to be heard. Ten calls on a single issue can be enough. How do you get ten people to call? Reach out and talk to your friends. Use your "circle of influence" that is, talk to people you come in contact with every day...your friends, neighbors, hairdresser, grocer, etc. When you talk to your friends, then your friends will talk to their friends and the circle grows.

Make new contacts and friends

Contact, work and stay connected with other groups--even if their focus isn't the same as yours. Working with different groups across the state will give you more of a voice and increase your chance of influencing the legislator. Legislators need to hear from people with different jobs, backgrounds, and concerns. They are used to hearing from the same kinds of people each year and when someone new calls, they notice.

Stay confident and informed

The more you know, the more confident you'll feel. You can learn more through talking to other people. There are individuals and groups that can give you information about the issues you are concerned about and changes as they happen. If you don't know the name of groups in your area, call CABHN at (860) 278-5688x12.

Calling Your Legislator

You'd be surprised. Legislators are very interested in hearing from the voters in their district (also called constituents). You can reach them at the Capitol or at home. (See back of pamphlet for ways to reach your legislator). Part of their job is to respond to you. Often when you call, a legislative assistant will take your call, but your message will get to the legislator. If you want to talk personally to the legislator, just say so.

Here are some quick and simple tips:

Ö Write out what you want to say.

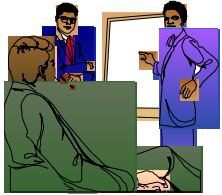
Gathering your thoughts on paper first will help you stay on target and get your message across.



Ö Introduce yourself.

- State your name and where you live.
- Give your phone number so they can contact you.
- If you are a registered voter, tell them...they want to know. If you are not a registered voter, go register...your vote does count.
- If you are a part of a group that has a position on a bill, tell the legislator. ***Let them know you are not alone.***

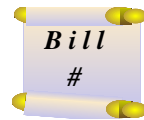
× *State your concerns and explain your position (how it impacts YOU!)*



Tell them about your personal experience...it works! They need to hear how a bill will hurt or help you in your everyday life. If possible, give them a fact that will help support your story and position. Paint a vivid picture in their mind with your story.

Ø *Know the bill number that you are concerned with.*

If you are calling about a specific bill that you've heard about, it's helpful to have the bill number. All bills have a number. Legislators have thousands of bills that call for their attention. Giving the bill number will give you a better chance of being heard. If you don't know the number, you can call CABHN for help or ask your legislator to find out for you.



Û *Say exactly what you want the legislator to do.*

They need to know specifically that you want them to:

- propose a bill to change something you don't like
- support a bill you think is a good idea
- not support (oppose) a bill you think is a bad idea
- change a bill so that it's better (specify what you want changed)

Û *Listen carefully*



Listen and take notes on what a legislator or assistant says. Feel free to ask questions if you don't understand the words they use or what they're saying. If you don't know an answer to a question, tell them you will find out and get back to them.

Then be sure you do.

Û *Stay focused on the subject.*

If you write down your thoughts before you call, you'll be able to check off the points you want to make. Don't be afraid to steer the legislator back to the subject you are concerned with. Sometimes legislators will try to put you off with statements such as

"it's very complicated"
"we don't have the money"

Think about your responses before you call. For example, I understand it's complicated, but we need long-term solutions; or there's money for a lot of other purposes...it's a matter of priorities.

Û *Follow up on your call*

Send a thank you note to your legislator.

Stay in touch--with more information, follow-up calls, and meetings.

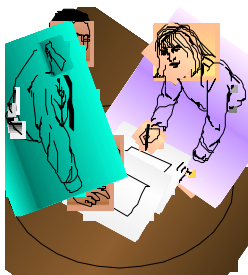


Get a commitment from them stating what they will do.

Meeting with Your Legislator

Getting ready for the meeting:

Legislators want to talk to "real people"...they are not the experts...you are the expert...only you can tell them how things are for you. Here are a few suggestions to get you ready.



- Choose a place for the meeting that will make you feel comfortable such as a community agency or library.
- Try to schedule the meeting when the legislature is not in session so you can get your legislator's full attention. During the legislative session, their schedules are very busy. Call their office to see if they are in session (see phone numbers at the end of this pamphlet).
- Prepare for the meeting by writing out what you want to say (limit it to one or two issues). Separate the myths from the facts.
- Invite people who are on your side to go with you. Make the group as varied as possible with people from different jobs & backgrounds.
- Know your legislator's background (committee assignments, district, voting record). If you need help, call CABHN.

At the meeting:

- Be in control--don't be frightened. Politely, but firmly, explain what you want. Don't get sidetracked.
- Be specific about what you want the legislator to do.
- Get your legislator to say specifically what he/she will do.
- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know", but that you will get the information and call back with it.
- Make it clear you will follow up & monitor the legislator's actions.

After the meeting:

- Send a thank you note to your legislator.
- Stay in touch--with information, follow-up calls, and more meetings.

Let them know you are watching.



Whether you call or meet with legislators, tell them that you will be watching to see what happens and how they vote on issues. Write short notes or call and let them know when you approve or disapprove of their actions. Keep your legislator accountable!

Get the Word Out...Create Your Event

Come up with your own creative ways to....

- get a legislator's attention
- focus attention on an issue



To focus attention on your issue, take advantage of a special occasion or event that is already scheduled. For instance, a visit by a politician to your area, a shelter closing, Mother's Day, etc.

You can schedule events inside or outside the Capitol/Legislative Office Building...or in your neighborhood. It doesn't always take a huge crowd or a lot of money.. BUT it takes some planning.

Past events have included:

- ◆getting people together to send valentines to legislators with a message about your concerns
- ◆staging a "funeral" march from Hartford City Hall to the Legislative Office Building carrying a casket to dramatize the effect of proposed cuts
- ◆leafleting business leaders to urge them to create good jobs
- ◆wearing "Jobs Not Cuts" T-shirts to meetings at the Capitol
- ◆setting up "tent cities" in town greens and parks
- ◆holding prayer vigils and candlelight marches

*Don't be limited to what's
been done in the past...
do your own thing!*

Note: There are rules about what you can do at the Legislative Office Building or the Capitol. For information, call CABHN.

Get the Word Out...Use the Media

Getting something printed in the paper isn't as hard as you might think. Letters to the editor are very widely read and can generate a lot of interest. The media usually wants to talk to "real people" who will be directly affected by the issue in the story.



You may also want to contact reporters from your local paper, radio or TV stations who cover related issues. These reporters especially like human interest stories...the stories that touch people's heart. Call the newspaper to get the name of a reporter who has written a story on what you're concerned about. Then, call that reporter ... they like to do follow up stories.

Weekly papers often want stories that cover local people or issues. Just write something and drop it off.

Here are some guidelines for writing a letter to the editor:

- Identify yourself with your name, address, and phone number
- State the issue you are writing about
- Keep the letter short and to the point



Dear Editor,

(Sample Letter to the Editor)

My name is Ana Williams, and I am a resident of New Britain. I am concerned about the co-payments people on medicaid must pay.

As a 75-year-old widow on medicaid and social security, I often find that I must choose between going without my heart medication and paying my electricity bill or other bills. I have many friends at the senior center that are in this same situation. We are very concerned.

I am asking the people of Connecticut to contact their legislators to change this during the upcoming legislative session.

Sincerely,

Ana Williams
114 Main Street
New Britain, CT 06053

Daytime phone: 222-1234

See the back of this booklet for phone numbers.



*So you're
going to the
Capitol*

**You can influence
what happens at
the Capitol!**

This section will give you ideas on how to testify at public hearings & describe what goes on during the Legislative Session.

The Legislative Office Building & State Capitol

These two buildings are located next to each other in Hartford. You can park in the garage next to the Legislative Office Building (LOB), but it often fills up early during the legislative session. Like any big building, the LOB can seem pretty confusing the first time you walk in (especially during the legislative session), but there are people there who will help you.

How to find out what's happening:

- ◆ On the first floor, just inside the front door, a League of Women Voters volunteer (wearing a red jacket) will be able to help you. Pick up pamphlets describing the LOB and the way the Legislature is supposed to work.
- ◆ Look for television monitors which show the day's schedule of all of the public meetings and hearings. If you don't see them, just ask someone. Capitol police officers are around to help too!
- ◆ Get written information about meetings (a daily bulletin), copies of bills and other information in the "bill room". This room is located off the hallway between the LOB and the Capitol. Just look for the mailboxes and you'll see it. You can also check out the Connecticut General Assembly's web site (see back of pamphlet).

If you can, visit the LOB and check it out before you testify. But don't worry, most people will be very helpful. Just ask.

Public Hearings at the Capitol

Public hearings can be an important part of advocacy efforts. They are supposed to give people a chance to learn about the bill and to say whether they are for or against the bill. ***Testifying at public hearings is an EXTREMELY important part of advocacy.*** Hearings ***CAN-NOT*** be ignored, even though they are usually very frustrating.

- 📞 You can call the legislative information room at (860) 240-0555 to find out if a bill has been scheduled for a public hearing.

Important facts about public hearings.

**Notices
for hearings
are very
short...**

only five days in advance—counting the day it is printed, the day of the hearing and weekends. The notice is printed in the Legislative Bulletin. Don't wait until the last minute to line up witnesses, get information or plan for events related to the hearing. Legislators can sometimes help you get more notice about the hearing date.

**Lines to sign
up to speak at
hearings are
very long...**

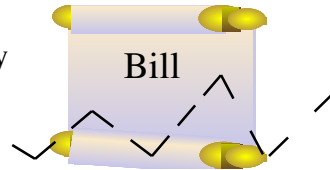
often forming hours before the hearing is scheduled to begin. Be prepared to get to the Capitol very early to sign up to testify at the hearing.

**The number
of bills on the
agenda can be
very large...**

ranging from 1 to 100, and they may or may not be on related topics. Despite time limits (usually 3 minutes), many witnesses speak at length because legislators ask questions.

Frequently two or three hearings on the same issue (different bill number) are held before different committees...making it difficult to monitor and influence the process. For example, proposals relating to managed health care might be heard by the Human Services, Public Health, Insurance and the Appropriations Committee. The Appropriations Committee frequently reviews bills since costs are usually involved.

Keep a close eye on the bouncing bill. Stay in touch with groups that can keep you informed and up to date.



How to testify at a public hearing

Be prepared to wait and listen.

Once you are signed up to testify, there is often a long wait before your name is called. The first hour of the hearing is reserved for testimony from legislators, representatives from state agencies, and municipal officials and then the public is heard. Use the time you are waiting to listen to what others are saying. Then you can respond or comment on their remarks when it's your turn to speak. Try not to repeat an issue that you have heard over and over again. When you testify, you could say that you agree with the previous testimony.

Bring copies if you can.

Since many legislators can't stay for the whole hearing, it's a good idea to bring copies of your testimony. You may need up to 40 copies. However, don't let it stop you if you can't bring copies!

Talk to committee members as they come and go.

Sometimes legislators are willing to talk with you about bills when they are outside the committee room. You can simply approach them politely and ask if they have a minute to speak with you.

When you testify..

- Remember that you only have 3 minutes to testify
- Identify yourself and who you are representing
- Identify the bill by name and number
- State if you are for or against the bill
- Explain your recommendation
- Summarize your position
- Thank the committee for the opportunity to speak
- Remember to practice your testimony***

Let your legislators know you've been to Hartford.

If possible, stay at the LOB long enough to find and talk to your representative or senator. It's helpful to call in advance and let them know you're coming. If you can't see them in person, be sure to leave a note telling them why you were there along with a copy of the bill of interest to you.

Lobby Days

Many groups schedule a day to go to the Capitol and talk to legislators about their concerns. They will find legislators in their offices, send them notes asking if they can leave the meeting they are in to talk with a constituent. If meetings of the full House or Senate are being held ("session days"), there are people who will take notes in to legislators to have them come out to talk to you. Most legislators respond to these requests, but you must understand that some may not be able to talk with you at that time. Lobby Days can get a lot of attention, but they can get a little crazy. You need to plan ahead and make sure you have help from people who have been to the LOB/Capitol before.

Be sure you have a simple, clear message and a brief fact sheet to give the legislator.

Understanding Your State Government



In this section find out...

Who are the decision makers?

When are decisions made?

How are public policies made?

What happens after a bill is proposed?

What is the budget?

Some Common Questions About Your State Government

⇒ **Who are the decision makers?**

The General Assembly

(State Legislature) This group is made up of two separate groups--the House of Representatives (151 members) and the Senate (36 members) with each member serving a two-year term. These two chambers have the authority to spend public funds and to tax the public.

The Governor

The main responsibility of the Governor is to recommend to the legislature how public funds should be spent and how money should be raised. Once this plan (the state budget and the tax plan) is approved, the Governor must make sure that the government --state agencies--spend the money as stated in the budget.

The Committees

There are 25 different joint committees that includes members of both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Committees are broken down by subject matter. They look at each bill and decide if it should have a public hearing and vote to decide whether another committee or the full Legislature should look at it. Each committee has a House and Senate co-chair who has a lot of power to decide what happens in the committee. Examples of committees include the Human Services Committee, the Education Committee, the Commerce Committee and the Judiciary Committee.

More on Committees....

Appropriations Committee--Why it's important

The Appropriations Committee is very important because it decides **how much** and **where** the money is spent. Subcommittees within this are responsible for *specific* areas of the budget which limits their ability to see the big picture and to shift funds.

Another reason the Appropriations Committee is important is because of its legislative authority. Many people think that when a committee kills a bill, that's the end of it. However, this is not necessarily so since the Appropriations Committee can propose any program changes it likes even without a public hearing.

Finance Committee

The Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee often seems like a foreign land to people who care about human service programs. However, in many respects it is even more powerful than the Appropriations Committee. The Finance Committee is responsible for raising and reducing all kinds of taxes (including income tax, sales tax, corporate taxes, etc.)

Every two years the Office of Fiscal Analysis issues a tax expenditure report which estimates how much different tax breaks are costing the state. You can get a published report by calling the Office of Fiscal Analysis at the LOB at (860) 240-0200.

Regulations Review Committee

This legislative committee meets every month to review and vote on regulations proposed by state agencies. Often these regulations make a big difference in the way programs operate.

Program Review & Investigation Committee

This legislative committee has staff to conduct studies on topics chosen by committee members. It can often be used to develop recommendations for legislation.

⇒ **When are the decisions made?**

Before the legislative session, a lot of individuals and groups talk with legislators about the things they would like done during the legislative session. Many times legislators have decided what they want to do long before the session starts.

Legislative Session

Long Session held during *odd* years (January to June)

- 2-year budget becomes law

Short Session held during *even* years (February to May)

- Budget adjustments made

Between Session "Interim" Activities

These are usually working groups, task forces and study committees meeting between the formal session. It's good to stay in touch year round to know what's happening.

⇒ **How are public policies made?**

Legislators propose the policy or bill, but you and your friends must give them the ideas for what is needed and actively work with them to get it passed.

⇒ **What happens after a bill is proposed?**

If a legislator is for a bill, he/she will try to get it passed. If opposed to the bill, he/she will use tactics to slow it down or kill it. There are times that you want a bill to go forward and other times when you want it killed. Let your legislator know what you want.

Going to "The Floor"

Bills that have finished being reviewed by committees go to the "floor" of the House and Senate for review by all of the members of the General Assembly. Bills assigned with "House numbers" (5000 or more) go to the House first, while Senate bills (lower numbers) go to the Senate first. When bills go to the floor, they are given a "file number". The file number is an important number to know because legislators use it when talking about a bill.

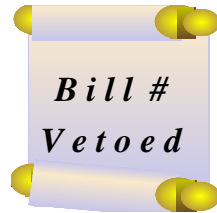
The bills are listed in a daily calendar and are assigned a "calendar number". They must "sit" on the calendar for three days before they're voted on. Usually they sit much longer than that while key House and Senate leaders review the bills ready for action. When the House and Senate meet each day, they will have a "go list" of bills they plan to discuss that day. Other bills just stay on the calendar. The House and Senate can still send bills back to committees--or just ignore them-- even though they are on the calendar. *See the back page for the internet address for the Connecticut General Assembly.*

Amendments

To get a bill sent to the Governor for signature, the House and Senate must pass (vote yes) on the same identical bill. If one of them votes to change (amend) the bill, the other must agree. If they can't agree, a small group of people from the House and Senate (conference committee) meets to see if they can work out an agreement. If they can, then that agreement must be approved by the House and Senate.

Veto

The Governor must approve every law passed by the House and Senate. Usually the Governor signs the bills (but there is a way a bill can become law without the Governor's signature). If the Governor doesn't like a bill, it is vetoed. If it is vetoed, the bill cannot become law unless the House and Senate each pass the bill with a vote of 2/3 of its members (overriding the veto). This doesn't happen very often.



Often people take it for granted that the Governor will sign the bill. That can be a big mistake. Opponents will lobby the Governor for a veto. Sometimes bills that passed the House and Senate by wide margins still get vetoed.

The Budget

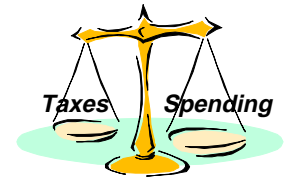
One of the most critical factors involved in the legislative process is *money*. Nearly every legislative proposal costs someone money to carry out— whether it's to develop regulations, enforce, evaluate, or implement. That means everyone needs to understand the way the budget works.



The Governor develops a budget plan. The Legislature rarely changes the total amount of money (the "bottom line") in the Governor's budget. However, the Legislature often changes the way money is spent and which programs get money. The Governor has the power to veto the Legislature's proposal, if necessary, to get his way.

Two sides to the budget—Taxes & Spending

When we think of government spending and the State budget, the Appropriations Committee (which decides how money is spent) usually comes to mind. However, the Finance Committee influences taxes also. Most of the talk about taxes that we hear from the Finance Committee is in terms of raising or reducing taxes.



Very little attention is paid to the "spending" that the state does through tax breaks, (also known as tax expenditures). As a result of tax breaks, the state collects less revenue and has less money to allocate for other important programs or projects.

Unfortunately, the Legislature does not make sure that the spending in the tax package matches state spending priorities. In fact, tax breaks are rarely examined after they become law except if there are proposals to amend or repeal them. Legislators won't examine these expenditures unless people like you demand that they do.

Taxes & budget are the focus of a constant "spin control" battle to control what people think is happening.

The Governor and other key players control the way their spending priorities are packaged and sold to the public. You need to look beyond what they are saying. For example, there are often arguments about whether a budget item (such as home care services) has been "cut"—when the funds for a program did not increase enough to cover the increase in inflation. Technically, the program did not have a funding cut; however, because of rising costs fewer people will be served. So it feels like a spending cut to consumers who see a longer waiting list for getting home care.

Beware...legislators may use cutting taxes to look good to the public; when in fact these "cuts" are actually shifting money from one program to another. Some of these shifts hurt the public.

⇒ **What else should I know?**

You may hear lots of abbreviations and references to different offices in the state government. Here are a few:

Office of Fiscal Analysis (OFA)

This office studies the costs associated with legislation and helps the legislators develop the budget and tax plan.

Office of Legislative Research (OLR)

This office does research for committees and individual legislators.

Legislative Commissioner's Office (LCO)

This office is comprised of attorneys assigned to do legal research and draft bills for legislators and committees.

Legislative Office Building (LOB)

This building is next to the capitol and is very often just called the "LOB". Free parking is available in the garage behind the LOB. Just inside the door to the LOB, the League of Women's Voters staffs an information booth which can help make your trip easier.