

# HOW A BILL BECOMES LAW

**Introduction of a bill** A bill may be introduced by any member in the **House** or **Senate**. On the day after it is filed, it will have its **first reading** on the floor of either **Chamber**, depending on where it was introduced. It is given a number and the presiding officer (**Speaker of the House** or **Lt. Governor**) will assign it to a **committee** for discussion.

**Committee** A committee is a group of representatives or senators that revolve around a specific issue. Committees report on introduced bills and can reach several decisions regarding the status of the bill. If the committee decides to not discuss the bill or gives an **unfavorable report**, the bill will fail to move forward. The general public is almost always welcome to offer comment during committee meetings.

**Rules Committee** If a committee reports favorably on a bill, it is sent to the Rules Committee. This committee can recommit a measure, meaning it can debate and amend a bill. The Rules Committee can also place a bill under **Orders of the Day**. The Orders of the Day is a list of bills and resolutions that are ready for the House or Senate to be debated and/or adopted on a specific date.

**Floor Vote – First Chamber** Once a bill passes through the Rules Committee, it goes to the **floor**, where debate will be held on the measure. **Amendments** can be offered and debated as well. The presiding officer will then **call the question**, meaning a vote will be held. If a bill receives a **majority** of the vote (or 2/3 for a **resolution**), then it has found passage and will move forward. If it does not pass, it can be sent back to committee for changes.

**Restart the process** After passage in either the House or the Senate, a bill will re-start the process in the other Chamber. A bill can fail at any step in either Chamber.

**Re-Vote on Changes** If the bill passes on both sides, but the second Chamber has made changes to the language of the bill, it must go back to the original Chamber to vote on the new text of the bill. If the two Chambers cannot agree on the new text, a **conference committee** will be held on the bill.

**Governor's Desk** After being passed by both Chambers, the bill is sent to the Governor. The Governor has three action options: **sign**, **permit to become law without signature**, or **veto**. The Governor must act on the bill within 40 days of **Sine Die**.

## Amendment

A change or addition to legislation.

## Bill

A written proposal for addition, modification, or repeal of statute law. "S.B." denotes "Senate Bill" and "H.B." denotes "House Bill."

## Committee Sub

A change or addition to legislation in committee.

## Crossover Day

Assigned day during session (traditionally the 28th or 30th day) where legislation must pass at least one Chamber in order to stay viable for passage.

## Resolution

A written proposal for addition, modification, or repeal of the state constitution. "S. R." denotes Senate Resolution and "H.R." denotes House Resolution.

## Sine Die

Pronounced "sign-E-die". Adjournment; end of session.

## FINDING YOUR LEGISLATOR

**Step 1:** Visit a trusted, non-profit site. Our recommendation is [www.VoteSmart.org](http://www.VoteSmart.org). Simply enter your address into the search box at the top and wait for the drop-down box to appear.

This will give you all of your officials – from the President and Cabinet to local judges.

\*Some addresses may require a +4 on the zip code for more accuracy. You can look that up on the USPS website: (<https://tools.usps.com/go/ZipLookupAction!input.action>), or by looking at some of your mail.

**Step 2:** Find their contact. By clicking on any one name, you can then select “bio” to be taken to his or her basic information. This will include their Capitol (either at the state or federal level) and district contact information. This information will be on the left, under the photo of the official.

- It is always best to use a district contact. This is more local and will (generally) result in a more rapid response.

## FINDING LEGISLATORS AT THE STATE CAPITOL

**Capitol address:** 206 Washington St. SW, Atlanta, GA 30334

Offices will be located either inside the Capitol or in the Coverdell Legislative Office Building (CLOB) across the street.

Legislators generally share offices – up to six per office for representatives and two per office for senators. Each office will have at least one administrative assistant who can help you find time on the legislators’ schedule to meet with them. They can also take detailed notes on your comments or let you know about the legislators’ committee meetings.

# GETTING A MEETING

**Rope lines:** “Rope lines” are a designated place outside the legislative voting floors where members of the public can request short meeting (generally under two minutes) with legislators. You can find these on the third floor.

Using the sheets on the podiums outside the Chambers, fill out a request for your legislator to come out of the Chamber to meet with you (House members: white form; Senators: yellow form). Then, hand it to the secretary sitting at the large desk in front of chambers. From there, a page (a young person visiting for the day) will go into Chambers to bring the legislator back to you. This is the easiest, and fastest way to meet a legislator.

**Scheduling a meeting:** To set a longer, sit-down, 1-to-1 or small group meeting, call your legislator or visit their office to schedule the meeting. You can find their contact information and office numbers via the process mentioned previously.

# TALKING TO A LEGISLATOR

This may be a one-hour in-person meeting, or a one-minute phone call. The goal is to get better at letting them know why you reached out, and why your voice matters – no matter how much time you have!

## 1. Identify yourself and the issue clearly and quickly. If you are their constituent (you live in their district) be SURE to mention that!

“Hi, my name is Crystal Jackson and I’m your constituent from Atlanta. I wanted to speak to you today about dignity for incarcerated women.”

## 2. Cite a connection you have to the issue.

“As a formerly incarcerated woman, I saw many of my fellow inmates unfairly shackled during their pregnancy and in giving birth, and I think the practice should stop.”

## 3. State your case – choose one simple, key fact to make your point strongly.

“Between 1980 and 2016, the number of women who were imprisoned in Georgia increased by 567 percent and yet we still force women in prison to be shackled all the way up to their childbirth.”

## 4. Make your ask – state what you want, clearly and concisely, and try to get a commitment.

“Will you help end this practice by supporting the Dignity for Incarcerated Women Act?”

## 5. Say “thank you” and make sure they know how to follow up with you. If you have materials, make sure to get them to the lawmaker!

“Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. Here is a handout about the bill and the many organizations working on it. We look forward to speaking with you more about the issue.”

# LOBBY DAYS

Lobby Days are bi-weekly, ACLU-sponsored events where we help people meet their legislators and discuss strategy.

We have lobby days dedicated to criminal justice reform, voters’ rights, reproductive rights, and immigrants’ rights.

Learn more about our lobby days at [acluga.org](http://acluga.org) or email [info@acluga.org](mailto:info@acluga.org).

**Pro-tip:** You can also use these steps to write an effective letter or email to your legislator to cover the same topics if you can’t get an in-person meeting.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is an effective way to generate attention for a particular cause. Here are some tips to help you use social media more effectively:

**Be visual:** Share a photo or infographic in order to increase likelihood of post visibility.

**Use hashtags:** Make sure to tweet to existing conversations or campaigns.

**Retweet and comment:** Don't just send out personal posts; retweet posts from your legislator's office and comment thoughtfully.

## PHONE CALLS

Phone calls can be an extremely effective way for you to communicate your views on any given issue, especially if in-person meetings make you anxious.

You can leave a message for your elected officials, entire committees, and the House and Senate leadership.

Use the tips in the previous pages to find contact information for your legislator and an abbreviated form of the messaging to leave a succinct message about why you are calling. You don't need to be more complicated than "Hi, my name is X, a constituent from city Y, and I'd like Representative/Senator Z to vote for/against HB001 because X."

## TIPS TO REMEMBER

**1. Be polite and professional** -- especially to the staff! Keep a positive attitude, even if you're being told no. Meeting with lawmakers is more about building a relationship than getting a quick yes. Go for the long game and work to build trust and a warm environment so you can be a trusted source of information and input.

**2. Stick to the content** -- only discuss one topic per meeting so you can be focused and use your time effectively. This will also be more professional and have a better chance of getting the lawmaker to agree to your ask.

**3. Relax** -- lawmakers work for us, the people of Georgia, and they want to hear from you. **Be confident and make personal connections** to the topic: Legislators read hundreds of bills every year and hear from many advocacy groups, so the heartfelt stories are more likely to stick with them.

**4. It is OK to tell a legislator that you do not know the answer to a question you are asked** -- (for example, a specific statistic). Assure them that you will **look it up after the meeting and get back in touch**—and then be sure you do!

**5. After any meeting or conversation with a legislator or staff member, always follow up!** Send them a thank you email, answer any questions they had, and ask for a follow up, if any is needed.

# RESOURCES

## ACLU GA

[www.acluga.org](http://www.acluga.org)

Facebook: ACLU of Georgia

Twitter: @ACLUofGA

Instagram: @ACLUofGA

## People Power

Peoplepower.org - ACLU People Power is an online tool for volunteers and supporters to organize in their local communities, state, and across the nation. People Power allows you to host and attend events while building a network of ACLU supporters in your community.

## Where to Vote

<https://www.mvp.sos.ga.gov/MVP/mvp.do>

## Georgia General Assembly

<http://www.legis.ga.gov> - see your Georgia legislative leaders, track legislation and watch the House and Senate chambers live.

## GovTrack

<https://www.govtrack.us/> - track federal legislators and federal legislation.

## City of Atlanta

<https://www.atlantaga.gov/> - track local legislation, watch debate and find your local city councilperson.