

Disability Advocacy Seminar

Series: Session 4

Understanding the Legislative Process & Advocacy

Ohio Centers for Independent Living (CIL)

Disability Rights Ohio (DRO)

Zoom Housekeeping

- This is a webinar presentation, so attendees are muted and will not have video capabilities.
- The webinar is being recorded for future distribution and will be stored for public re-use and access.
- The chat feature is disabled. Please type questions in the Q&A.
- If you do not wish to have your name recorded when posting questions in the Q&A, set your name to anonymous. You may also send your questions privately to panelists.
- CART Captioning or C-Print can be accessed in a separate browser by using the link found in the Q&A.
- Live captions are also enabled. Go to the subtitle settings to enlarge captions on your individual screen.
- Please pin the ASL interpreter as needed.
- A transcript will be available by request approximately one week after the presentation.

The 3 Branches of Government/Separation of Powers

- **Executive—
enforces the law**

- **Legislative—
enacts the law**



- **Judicial—
interprets the law**

Federal Government

- Executive branch
 - President
 - Administrative Agencies
 - Department of Education, Department of Labor, Department of Health, etc.
- Legislative branch
 - U.S. House of Representatives
 - U.S. Senate
- Judicial branch
 - Supreme Court of the United States
 - U.S. Courts of Appeals
 - U.S. District Courts

State Government in Ohio

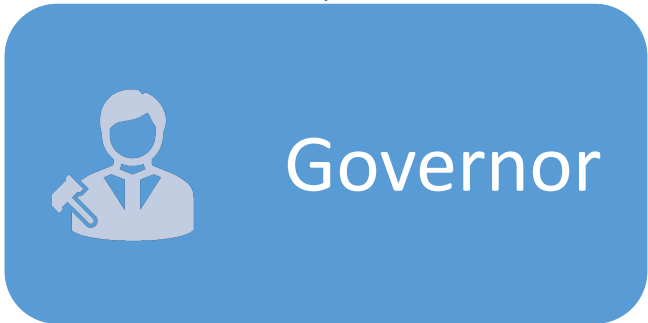
- Executive branch –
 - Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and Attorney General
 - Auditor of State
 - Secretary of State and Treasurer of State
 - State Board of Education
 - State Agencies and Departments
 - The governor's cabinet
 - Boards and commissions whose members are appointed by the governor

Boards and Commissions

- Citizens appointed by the governor to provide external oversight of state government, particularly the legislature
- They may issue reports, investigate complaints, adopt regulations
- Help keep important issues at the forefront
- Examples:
 - Ohio Civil Rights Commission
 - Nursing Board
 - Minority Health Commission
- Different than committees, which are internal, and have members of the legislature
- Boards: provide licensure for professionals

State Government in Ohio cont.

- Legislative branch, known as the General Assembly
 - House of Representatives – 99 representatives
 - Senate – 33 senators
- Legislators are elected to represent geographic districts
- A lot of legislative work happens in committees
 - Example: Civil Justice, Families & Aging, Agriculture
 - Committees include majority and minority members
 - The chair decides the agenda
- Judicial branch
 - Supreme Court of Ohio and lower courts



Local Government

- Includes counties, cities, townships, and villages
- Executive
 - Mayor or city manager
- Legislative
 - Council (the size and structure vary depending on where you live)
- Judicial
 - Municipal court

Legislation and Advocacy in Ohio

How are laws made, and when can you contribute your opinion in the process

Talk the Talk: Common Terms You'll Hear

- Bills in the house are assigned a number and called “**House Bill [number]**” or **HB [number]**”
- Bills in the senate are assigned a number and called “**Senate Bill [number]**” or **SB [number]**”
- **Chairperson** = the member of the majority party who leads a committee in the legislature
- **Sponsor** = the legislator who introduces a bill
- **Co-sponsor** = legislators who sign on in support of a bill
- **Hearing** = a meeting where evidence in support or against a bill is presented to a committee. Members of the public can provide testimony, watch and read about the meetings.
- **Legislative Service Commission (LSC)** = nonpartisan (means not political) agency that helps the General Assembly with writing and researching bills

How a Bill Becomes a Law (Chamber 1)



Bill is introduced in either the House or Senate



Bill is assigned to a Committee



Bill will go through several committee hearings receiving sponsor, proponent, opponent, and interested party testimony



The Committee will then vote to report the bill to the chamber floor



The chamber will vote on the bill in session sending the legislation to the next chamber

How a Bill Becomes a Law (Chamber 2)



Bill is assigned to a Committee



Bill will go through several committee hearings receiving sponsor, proponent, opponent, and interested party testimony



The Committee will then vote to report the bill to the chamber floor



That chamber will vote on the bill in session sending the legislation to the Governor

How a Bill Becomes a Law (Rejected by other Chamber)



If the bill is rejected or there are significant changes it will go to Conference Committee where members from each chamber meet to discuss differences



The bill then is reported back to the floor of each chamber and is voted on again



Once passed it is sent to the Governor's desk

How a Bill Becomes a Law (Governor)



Once passed the bill is sent to the Governor's desk



The Governor can either sign or veto the bill



If the Governor vetoes the bill the legislature has the opportunity to overturn the veto with 3/5 vote

Lobbying vs. Advocating

Lobbying

- When you ask a legislator to take a specific action
- “You should vote no on House Bill 23 because...”

Advocating

- When you educate a legislator on an issue using personal stories, research, and/or statistics, but do not urge them to take a specific action

Note: Individuals do not need to worry about lobbying. Lobbying only comes in to play when you are representing an organization, especially if you are a paid employee.

Ways to Advocate on Legislation

- Call or write your senators and representatives
- Call or write the legislators who are sponsoring the bill
- Provide testimony to explain why you support or do not support the bill
 - Testimony can be provided in-person (or virtually during certain circumstances) or through writing
- Meet with coalitions and groups to discuss unified approaches
 - Many voices are stronger than one when it comes to this type of advocacy

Giving Testimony

- If there is a bill you are interested in following, you can sign up to receive updates from My Ohio Legislature
- Or you can go to the Ohio House website and keep an eye on the committee schedule
- Committees will hear testimony in three different areas:
 - Proponent – people who support the bill
 - Opponent – people who do not support the bill
 - Interested Party – people who are not taking a stance, but just educating
- Sometimes they will have more hearings if there is a lot of people interested in testifying

Giving Testimony Continued

- 24 hours before the committee hearing, email the chair the written copy of your testimony
- The chair will then have you fill out a witness slip, a PDF with your name and the bill you are testifying on
- If you testify in person, you will have 3-5 minutes to speak
- If you testify written only, you can submit any length of testimony

Outline of Strong Testimony

- Always start by thanking the chair for the opportunity to provide testimony.
- Introduce yourself in a few sentences, highlighting any personal connecting you have to the bill
- Share any relevant information about the bill's impact
- Share a personal story
- Clearly state the takeaways you want the committee members to have
- Thank the committee again for listening

What to Expect When Testifying

- Questions from committee members
- Varying attention from committee members
- Don't be discouraged! Testifying is extremely important and often very impactful
- Your voice is now a part of the public record on an issue

Advocating for a Bill to be Introduced

- If you have an idea for a change you like to see implemented through legislation...
- Research your issue
 - Think about arguments against your idea
 - Think about all the impacts and why the bill is needed
 - Research other states that have enacted similar laws
- Strength in numbers
 - Form a coalition and gather support from other coalitions, organizations, businesses, stakeholders, etc.
- Educate
 - Talk with the public and legislators about the issue

Advocating for a Bill to be Introduced Cont.

- Find a sponsor
 - Meet with legislators to find someone interested in introducing your bill
- The sponsor will then work with the Legislative Service Commission to write the bill language
 - The Legislative Service Commission is non-partisan
 - They work directly with the legislature to write bill language and provide research
- Once you have a bill, you can meet with more legislators to gather support

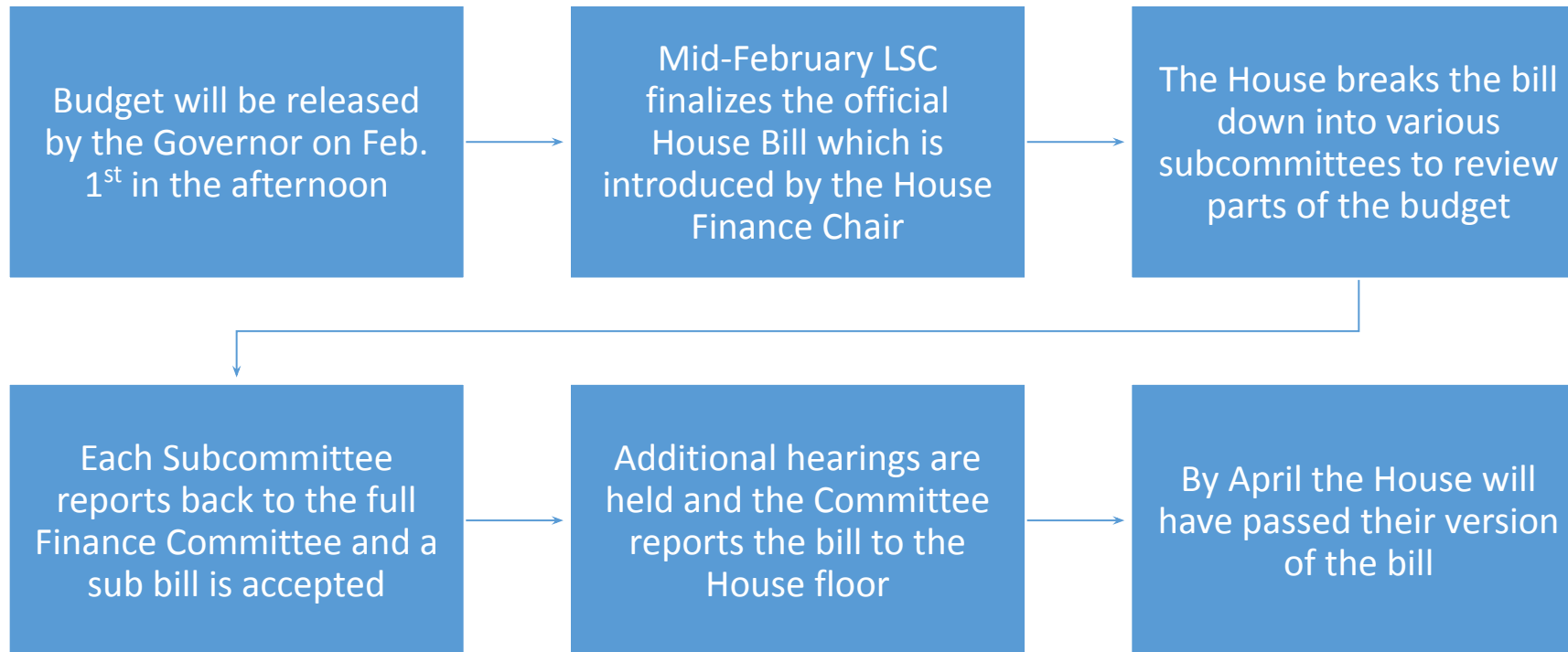
Choosing a Sponsor for Your Bill

- Consider the majority party
- Aim to have co-sponsors, with bi-partisan support
- Consider which legislators are on committees in areas that relate to your bill
 - For example, don't ask the chair of the agriculture committee to sponsor a bill about healthcare
- Build a strong relationship and keep in touch

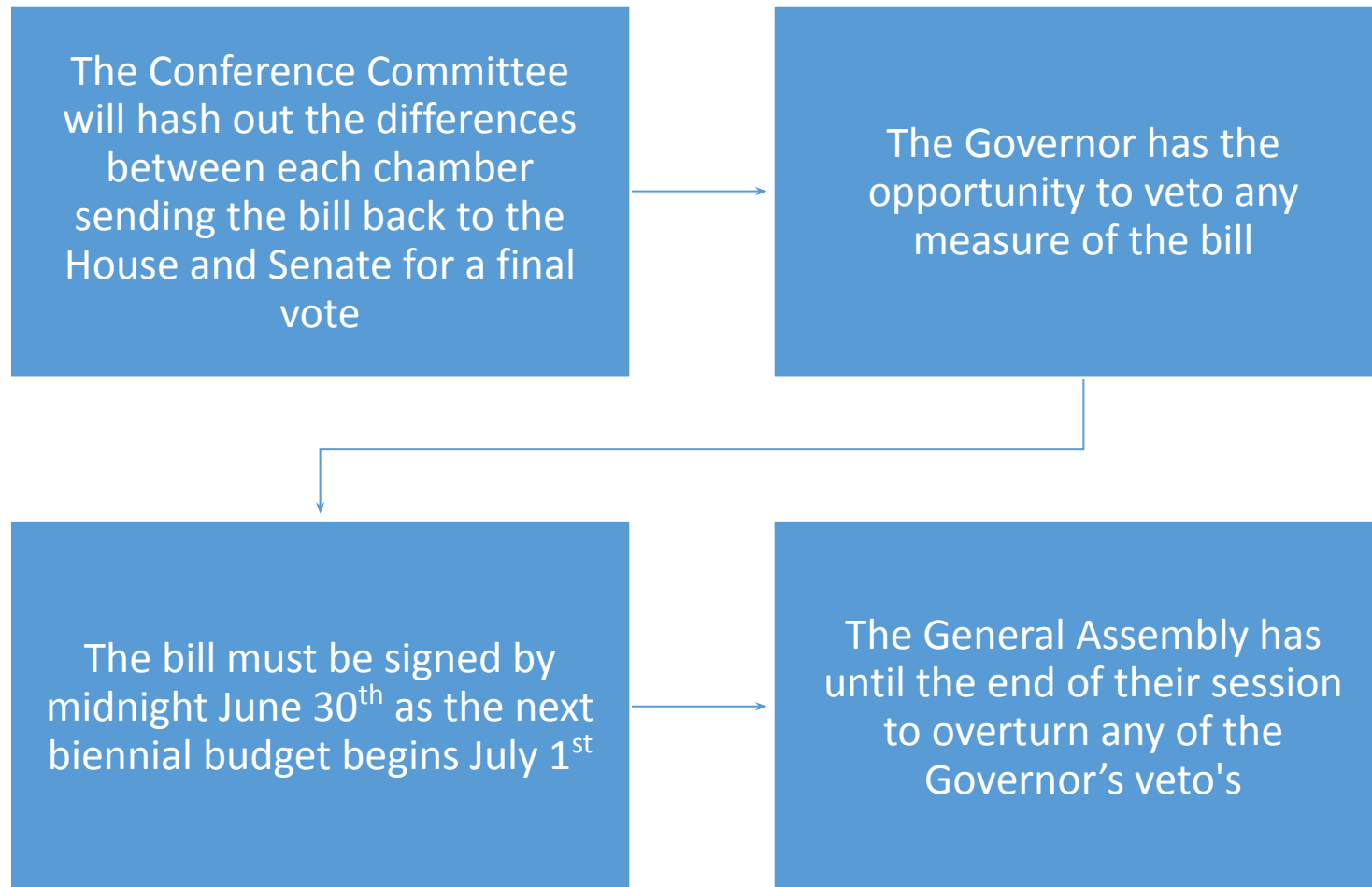
Another Advocacy Opportunity: The Budget Cycle

- Every two years Ohio's government works together to create a budget
- Why advocate during the budget cycle?
 - It is your chance to help the government decide what issues are most important to the people that live here
 - Increasing funding can help achieve large, systemic changes
 - Lots of opportunities to have your voice heard
- Want to stay updated on how the state spends its budget?
 - <https://checkbook.ohio.gov/>

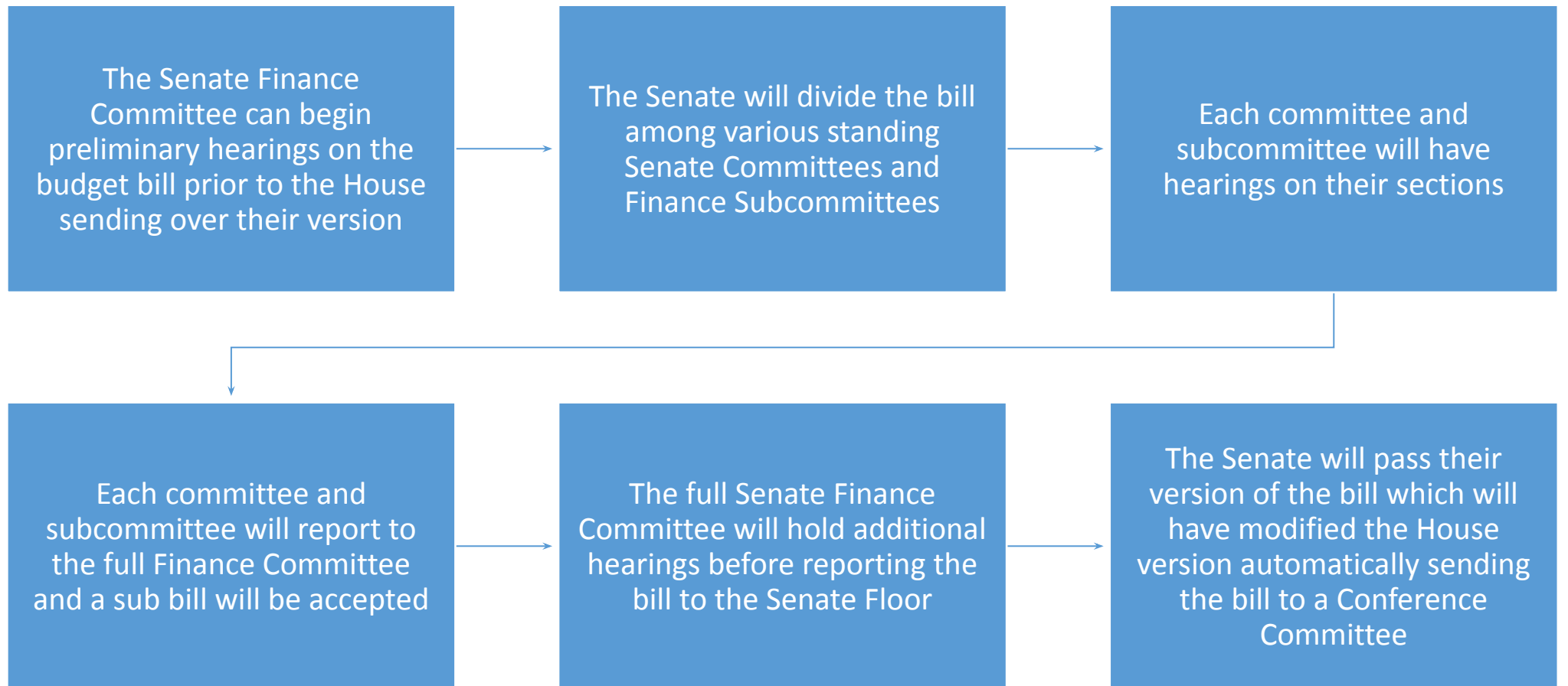
Budget Overview: House (February – April)



Budget Overview: Signed (June)



Budget Overview: Senate (April – June)



Key Times in the Budget

- Mid to Late February
 - This is when state agencies will be testifying
 - It is a chance to learn in more detail what is in the budget
 - It is also a chance to get a sense of how the legislators are thinking about different items
- March
 - This is when members of the public can start testifying
- Throughout the process:
 - Meet with legislators to keep bringing up the issues you care about

Policy in Action: State Agencies/Departments

- Ohio has more than 20 state agencies and departments that focus on different areas
- The agencies do the “day-to-day” work of the government
- To name a few:
 - Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD)
 - Ohio Department of Medicaid
 - Ohio Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services
 - Ohio Department of Job and Family Services
 - Ohio Department of Education
 - Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD)

Getting Involved with Agencies

- Most agencies have workgroups, boards, and committees
 - Some groups are open to the public, and some require applications or appointments
 - You can find these groups on the agency website and learn how to stay up to date
- Rulemaking
 - Agencies regularly make and review rules for the Ohio Revised Code
 - You can submit public comments or attend public hearings – stay updated on the agency's website

Rulemaking Process: JCARR

- JCARR = Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review
 - Five members of Ohio House of Representatives
 - Five members of the Ohio Senate
- After public hearings are held by the applicable state department, JCARR reviews the rule
- JCARR meets typically every 3 weeks
- Each rule must be reviewed every 5 years by agencies and JCARR

Rulemaking Best Ways to Get Involved

- Sign up to track rules in areas that impact you at www.RuleWatchOhio.gov
- For new rules:
 - Provide written or spoken comments during the hearing process to the state agency/department
 - Stay tuned for additional opportunities to submit comments during the JCARR process
- For rules under review:
 - Contact your representative and senator, tell them about your concerns/ideas and ask them to put pressure on JCARR
 - If there is a chance for public comment, submit your concerns in writing or at the hearing. (NOTE: not all rules in review will get a hearing)

Steps 1: I want to meet my legislator, what do I do?

- Log on to your computer or smart device
- Open a website browser
- Type: www.legislature.ohio.gov
- Find the box labeled “Who Represents Me?” and type your address

WHO REPRESENTS ME?

Search By Address

Search

Search By ZIP [What's My 9-Digit ZIP Code?]

Search

— or —



Browse the Interactive District Maps

Step 2: Schedule a Meeting, Calling

When calling:

- Go to the Representative's or Senator's website
- Find their office phone number under the "Contact" tab

Example: <https://ohiosenate.gov/members/nickie-j-antonio>

Step 2: Script for Calling

When calling:

- **Here is a script you can use when calling to schedule a meeting:**

Hello, my name is _____. I live at (your address). I am calling to schedule a meeting with (Representative name) to talk about _____. I would like to meet (on Zoom/at the statehouse/at a location in our district).”

- **You can use this same script to leave a voicemail, just include your phone number at the end. “Please give me a call back at (your phone number)”.**

Step 2: Schedule a Meeting, Email

When sending an email, be sure to know if you are sending it to a Representative or a Senator

- Ohio state representatives use the email format: rep(district number)@ohiohouse.gov
 - Example, Representative Bill Seitz represents District 30, so his email is rep30@ohiohouse.gov
- Ohio senators use the email format: LastName@ohiosenate.gov
 - Example, Senator Louis Blessing's email is blessing@ohiosenate.gov

Step 2: Email Script

Here is an email template you can use:

Subject: Scheduling Constituent Meeting

Email Body:

Hello Rep/Senator XX,

My name is _____. My address is _____. I am reaching out to schedule a meeting with you to discuss _____. I would like to meet (on Zoom/at the statehouse/at a location in our district). Here are a few upcoming dates and times I am available: (include days and times). Please let me know what works best for (representative/senator).

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you,

Name

(Your email, phone number)

Scheduling Tips

- Always include your address. This lets the legislator know you are in their district.
- If you get the legislative aide, tell them what you want to talk about.
- Know what days and times work best for you to meet. Be flexible!
- If you cannot meet with the Representative or Senator, meeting with staff is effective and important. The aides help make things happen in the office!

You Have the Meeting, What Happens Next?



Learn a bit about who you are meeting with!

<https://ohiohouse.gov/members/jean-schmidt>



Legislators have a limited amount of time to discuss issues with members of their communities



Research or practice your points before the meeting

Write down any statistics or important information on a notepad to keep organized

Share your story!

Social Media is a GREAT Tool!

- Many legislators use social media
 - Facebook
 - Instagram
 - Twitter
 - TikTok
- When you are researching a legislator before meeting them, look them up on Twitter and Facebook.
- Find things you have in common
 - Maybe they worked on a bill that helped your community
 - Maybe you grew up in the same town or went to the same school(s)
- Take photos and tag them!

How to Prepare for the Meeting

- Keep it simple and focus on one or two issues
- What are the key points you want the legislator to remember from your meeting?
- How to share your story:
 - Start with 1-2 sentences introducing yourself.
 - Focus on connecting things you've experienced to policy action
 - Think of 1-2 specific examples to share; short but detailed
 - Remember, you are the expert!
 - There's no perfect formula.

What to Expect During the Meeting

- The meeting will usually happen very quickly!
- Meetings with legislative aides are just as impactful
- Legislators might ask you technical questions or want detailed information. It is okay to let them know you don't have an answer. Tell them you will get an answer and email it to them.
- A legislator might talk a lot during your meeting or not!

Tips for Talking to Your Legislator

- Start by thanking them for the meeting
- Let them know the issue or issues you are there to discuss
- Tell them a personal story that relates to the issue if you are comfortable
- They might cut you off or interrupt you with a question. Stay calm and try your best to respond to their question or statement
- Sometimes meetings can be frustrating if they don't seem interested or seem argumentative. Stick to your topic!

After the Meeting

Send a thank you email or thank you card. It is always important to thank them for the meeting

Template you can use:

Hi (insert their title and name),

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me to discuss _____. [Briefly restate the issue and potential solution(s) discussed.] I look forward to collaborating in the future!

Thank you,

Insert name

Recap: Relationship Building Tips

- Everyone likes to be appreciated
 - Always be polite and thank your legislator for their time
 - Read up on things the legislator has done, and compliment them on ideas or policies you appreciate
- Keep it local
 - If you have the chance, try meeting your legislator somewhere in your district! This helps remind you both of your common ground and personalizes the meeting.
- Consistency
 - Relationships take time to build. Keep engaging!
- Bring talking points
 - Legislators are very busy and have a lot to remember
 - If you are meeting on a specific issue, bring a list of key bullet points that the legislator can keep

Recap: Build Relationships with Your Legislators

- Elected official's job is to represent their constituents – YOU!
- Your lived experiences give you valuable knowledge on what works and what is needed.
- First, find out who your representatives and senators are:
 - State: www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislators/district-maps
 - Federal: www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative and www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm
- Next, join their mailing list to keep track of opportunities to meet them, and learn about what issues they work on
- Write letters, emails, make calls, and request meetings to share your perspectives and priorities with your legislator

Thank You!

Contact Us!

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Please join us for our final seminar:

Demonstrating a Process for Systemic Advocacy

Thursday March 9, 2023

2- 4pm EST

- Many thanks to our interpreter and captionist.
- Resources for the information in this presentation are listed on the slides at the end of this presentation.
- Recordings, transcripts, and copies of the presentation will be available after the series is complete. You'll receive more info by email.

Sources

- [Branches of Government | house.gov](#)
- [State Government - Ohio Secretary of State](#)
- [Knowing Your Roles: City and Town Governments](#)
- [The Legislative Process | Ohio Legislature](#)
- [Follow the Money - The Center for Community Solutions](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions | JCARR](#)
- [Guide to Public Participation in the Rule-Making Process](#)