

How it Works And How You Can Help

The Legislative Process and You

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Throughout the years, legislation affecting common interest developments has been plentiful. Some laws have helped, and some have hurt communities. The A&K newsletter has brought you information on new laws and, in this issue, on pending bills that affect your communities.

You, as a resident of California, are directly impacted by these new laws. As such, you have a "vested interest" in understanding them. With understanding can come the ability to let your voice be heard, and to affect the discussion on the pending bills making their way through the legislative process.

To better understand the process, here is a brief refresher outline as to the legislative process in California on how an idea becomes law:

1. All legislation begins with an idea. These ideas can come from anyone. The legislative process begins when someone persuades a Senator or Assembly member to author a bill to address this idea.

2. A legislator sends the idea and maybe even suggested language for the bill to the Legislative Counsel where it is drafted into the actual bill. The drafted bill is returned to the legislator for introduction. This is called putting the bill across the Desk.

3. A bill's first reading is when the Clerk assigns it a bill number, and reads the number, the name of the author, and the descriptive title of the bill. The bill is then sent electronically to the Office of State Printing. A bill must be in print for thirty (30) days before it can be acted upon.

4. The bill then goes to the Senate or Assembly Rules Committee where it is assigned to the appropriate policy committee for its first hearing. Bills are assigned according to subject area. During the hearing the author presents

the bill, people testify in support or opposition of the bill, and the committee acts on the bill. The committee can pass the bill, pass the bill as amended or defeat the bill. It takes a majority vote of the membership of the committee to pass a bill. Bills which require money must also be heard in fiscal committee, Senate or Assembly Appropriations.

5. Bills passed by the committees are read a second time in the house of origin and then placed in the Daily File on Third Reading. When a bill is read the third time, it is explained by the author, discussed by the Members and voted on by a roll-call vote. Bills which require money, or which take effect immediately,

promise is reached, the conference report is voted upon in both houses.

8. The bill then goes to the Governor. The Governor has three choices. He or she can sign the bill into law, allow it to become law without his or her signature, or veto it. A governor's veto can be overridden by a two-thirds vote in both houses. Most bills go into effect on January 1 of the next year. Urgency measures take effect immediately upon being signed by the Governor and chaptered by the Secretary of State.

Once a bill is in print and ready for its first reading, you can communicate your concerns directly with your legislator, whether or not he or she is a member of

the committee hearing the bill. You can contact your legislator either by telephone, facsimile, e-mail, or in person, either at his or her local office or at their office in Sacramento. You have valuable information that can help your legislator decide on how to vote on the bill.

You can also participate by testifying at the committee hearings. While more difficult, your testimony can have greater impact on the deliberations of the committee members. Note that this is how the lobbyists effectively impact legis-

lation. They are located in Sacramento and have existing relationships with the legislators and staff, and have access to the information regarding hearing dates and times.

Remember, as a Californian and a resident, you are directly impacted by what our representatives in Sacramento do. Therefore, it is to your direct benefit to make your thoughts and comments about pending bills known to them. You can have a voice in government!

Portions of this article were extracted from the Senate Rules Committee Pamphlet on voter participation.

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require 27 votes in the Senate and 54 votes in the Assembly. All other bills require 21 and 41 votes, respectively.

6. Once the bill has been approved by the house of origin, it proceeds to the other house where the procedure is repeated.

7. If a bill is amended in the second house, it must go back to the house of origin for concurrence, which is agreement on the amendments. If agreement cannot be reached, the bill moves to a two-house conference committee to resolve differences. Three members of the committee are from the Assembly, and three are from the Senate. If a com-