



**A GUIDE TO  
LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY  
FOR LOCAL OFFICIALS**



**NEW HAMPSHIRE MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION**





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# **Introduction**

The New Hampshire Municipal Association (NHMA) represents the interests of cities and towns before the New Hampshire General Court and state agencies.

In the process, NHMA regularly calls on local officials to exercise their influence with legislators. This handbook is intended to help local officials understand the legislative process, appreciate the importance of it to their communities and work effectively with NHMA to represent their communities' interests.

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# Why It Matters

Newly elected or appointed local officials may be surprised to discover that they need to be familiar not only with their local ordinances and regulations, but with a broad array of state laws, and that they need to keep current on changes in those laws. They also need to use their influence to affect state legislation. Why is this important? Read on.

New Hampshire is not a “home rule” state. Cities and towns in New Hampshire are political subdivisions of the state; as such, they have only the powers granted to them by the state legislature. And what the legislature giveth...

State law necessarily authorizes municipalities to exercise a broad range of powers, such as raising funds through taxation or borrowing, enacting ordinances to regulate specific matters, purchasing and selling property, hiring employees, entering into contracts, and regulating land use through planning and zoning regulations. All of these powers may be exercised only within the limits authorized by state law. Similarly, municipal authority over police and fire departments, roads, solid waste disposal, water and sewer facilities, and many other areas is governed by state law, and thus is ultimately controlled by the legislature.

Consequently, there are many opportunities for legislation to affect municipalities. Some of these are obvious—for example, changes in statutes regarding town meetings and elections, zoning ordinances, or roads. Others are less obvious but may be even more important. For example, a change in the state meals and rooms tax may affect cities and towns, because revenue from that tax is shared with the municipalities. Changes in the state retirement system may affect those municipalities that have elected to have their officers and employees participate in the system.

Legislators may not always recognize the effects of state legislation on municipalities unless they hear about these effects from the local officials who have to deal with them. For this reason, a municipal leader’s responsibilities include representation of the municipality’s interests in the legislative process. This handbook offers information and suggestions on how to fulfill that responsibility.





# Glossary

The legislative process has its own lexicon that can leave the newcomer confused. Here is a guide to some terms used frequently in and around the legislature.

***Biennium*** – The duration of one legislative term. Under the state Constitution, the Senate and the House of Representatives each assemble “for organizational purposes” on the first Wednesday of December in even-numbered years, and are dissolved at 12:01 a.m. on the first Wednesday of December two years later. Each chamber assembles for business beginning in January every year. Compare to “session” definition (1).

***Calendar*** – Schedule of upcoming events in the House or Senate, published weekly by each body, including committee meetings and hearings, agenda for legislative sessions, amendments to bills scheduled for session, and other matters. Each chamber’s calendar is available on line: go to [www.gencourt.state.nh.us](http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us) and click on “House of Representatives” or “State Senate,” then “Calendars and Journals.”

***Chapter law*** – See “session law.”

***Committee of conference*** – A committee of members from both the House and the Senate, appointed to resolve differences between two versions of a bill that have passed each chamber.

***Concurrent resolution*** – See “House (or Senate) concurrent resolution.”

***Consent calendar*** – A portion of the agenda for a floor session including items not requiring debate, which is voted on in a single action. Noncontroversial or obviously ill-advised bills are typically placed on the consent calendar for passage or defeat, as appropriate.

***Constitutional amendment concurrent resolution (CACR)*** – A resolution proposing an amendment to the state constitution. If the resolution is approved by a three-fifths majority in both the House and the Senate, it will be placed on the next general election ballot. The amendment will become effective if approved by a two-thirds majority of the voters.

***Crossover day*** – Date by which bills originating in each legislative chamber must be approved and sent to the other chamber.

***Division vote*** – A vote on which the total number of votes cast on each side is recorded (as opposed to a voice vote). No record is made of an individual legislator’s vote with a division vote. Compare to “roll call.”

**Enrolled bill** – A bill that has been approved in the same form by the House and Senate, has been reviewed by and received any necessary technical corrections by the Office of Legislative Services, and has been signed by members of the House and Senate Enrolled Bills Committees. The House Speaker and Senate President must then sign off on the bill before it is sent to the governor for action.

**Executive session** – Public meeting of a House or Senate committee to discuss and act on pending bills, at which public testimony is not accepted.

**Fiscal note** – A note at the end of a bill indicating its projected fiscal impact on the state or on municipalities, counties, etc. A bill number with the letters “FN” at the end (for example, HB 1123-FN) simply means that the bill includes a fiscal note.

**Floor action** – Debate and vote on a bill by the entire Senate or House meeting in session.

**Floor amendment** – An amendment to a bill offered by one or more legislators from the floor of the House or Senate while the chamber is meeting in session.

**General Court** – Formal name of the legislature in New Hampshire.

**House (or Senate) concurrent resolution (HCR or SCR)** – A resolution of the House/Senate, which crosses to the other chamber for action if approved. Does not go to the governor for signature, and does not have the effect of law.

**House (or Senate) joint resolution (HJR or SJR)** – A resolution of the House/ Senate, which crosses to the other chamber if approved, and, if approved by the latter chamber, goes to the governor for signature. Upon signature or inaction by the governor, it becomes a session law, but is not codified in the Revised Statutes Annotated.

**House (or Senate) resolution (HR or SR)** – A formal statement of the will or opinion of the House/ Senate, adopted by majority vote. Does not go to the other chamber upon adoption unless it is a concurrent or joint resolution, and does not have the effect of law. Compare to “House (or Senate) concurrent resolution,” “House (or Senate) joint resolution.”

**House bill (HB)** – A bill that originates in the House—for example, HB 1416. Bills are usually numbered sequentially in the order of their introduction each term.

**Inexpedient to legislate (ITL)** – Recommendation in a committee report that a bill should be defeated. If the full Senate or House adopts the report, the bill is killed.

**Interim study** – Recommendation in the second year of the biennium that a bill be studied further by the House or Senate committee to which it was referred. A bill that is sent to interim study will not emerge during the same biennium, and a new bill must be filed to take further action in a subsequent biennium.

**Joint resolution** – See “House (or Senate) joint resolution.”

**Legislative Office Building (LOB)** – Office building in Concord across State Street from the State House, in which most House and Senate committees meet.

**Legislative Services** – The New Hampshire Office of Legislative Services, located in the State House, which is responsible for drafting all bills and amendments.

**Legislative service request (LSR)** – A request to draft a bill, submitted to Legislative Services by a senator or representative at the beginning of a session.

**Ought to pass (OTP)** – Recommendation in a committee report that a bill should pass. If the full House or Senate adopts the report, the bill is sent to the other chamber (or, if it has already passed the other chamber, to the governor for signature).

**Ought to pass with amendment (OTP/AM or OTP/A)** – An “ought to pass” recommendation subject to an amendment proposed by the committee, or by a member from the floor.

**Re-referred bill** – A bill that remains in the Senate committee to which it was referred for further work during the first year of the biennium. It must be reported out for a vote by the full Senate in the first few session days of the second year of the biennium. Compare to “retained bill.”

**Retained bill** – A bill that remains in the House committee to which it was referred for further work during the first year of the biennium. It must be reported out for a vote by the full House in the first few session days of the second year of the biennium. Compare to “re-referred bill.”

**Roll call** – A vote on which each legislator’s vote is recorded.

**RSA** – Abbreviation for “Revised Statutes Annotated,” the published code (with annotations to case law) of all New Hampshire statutes. Every statute has an RSA chapter and section number—for example, RSA 294:6 refers to section 6 of chapter 294 of the Revised Statutes Annotated.

**Senate bill (SB)** – A bill that originates in the Senate—for example, SB 95. Bills are usually numbered sequentially in the order of their introduction.

**Session** – (1) A calendar year in the General Court—for example, the 2004 Session. Compare to “biennium.” (2) A meeting of the full House or Senate, usually held weekly, as in “The House will meet in session on Thursday, March 4.”

**Session law** – Refers to each law enacted during a session of the General Court. Each bill that becomes a session law is assigned a chapter number before it is codified in the New Hampshire statutes. The bill’s chapter number is specific to the year it is enacted. For example, Laws of 2004, chapter 199. Also referred to as a “chapter law.”

**Table (or “lay on the table”)** – To suspend consideration of a bill by the full House or Senate. A bill that has been laid on the table will stay there until there is a subsequent motion to remove it from the table.

**28-a** – Refers to Part 1, Article 28-a of the New Hampshire Constitution, which prohibits the state from mandating any new, expanded, or modified program or responsibility that necessitates additional municipal expenditures unless the program or responsibility is fully funded by the state. Many bills are killed in the legislature on the ground that they violate Article 28-a.

# **The Process**

The following discussion summarizes how a bill becomes law. This is necessarily very basic, and there are a number of detours that a bill can take along the way. However, every bill that becomes law must, at the very least, go through the same basic process in each chamber: formal introduction, a public committee hearing, an executive session, a committee report and a vote by the full chamber.

## **Introduction**

Every bill begins with a legislative service request—a House or Senate member files a proposed bill with the Office of Legislative Services, which drafts the appropriate language for the bill. Once the bill is drafted, the sponsor (together with any co-sponsors) signs it and files it with the clerk of the House or Senate, as appropriate. After a formal “reading” of the bill, the House Speaker or Senate President will assign the bill to the appropriate committee for a public hearing. (As a practical matter, a bill is unofficially assigned to a committee even before it leaves Legislative Services, but the assignment doesn’t become official until after formal introduction of the bill.)

As of 2019, there are 21 standing committees in the House and 12 in the Senate, as listed below. (The number and names of committees change occasionally.) Information about each committee is available at its Web page: go to [www.gencourt.state.nh.us](http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us), click on “House of Representatives” or “State Senate,” then “Committees” and locate the committee.

### **House Committees**

Children and Family Law  
Commerce and Consumer Affairs  
Criminal Justice and Public Safety Education  
Election Law  
Environment and Agriculture  
Executive Departments and Administration Finance  
Finance - Division I  
Finance - Division II  
Finance - Division III  
Fish and Game and Marine Resources  
Health, Human Services and Elderly Affairs Judiciary  
Labor, Industrial Relations and Rehabilitative Services Legislative Administration  
Municipal and County Government Public Works and Highways  
Resources, Recreation and Development Rules  
Science, Technology and Energy  
State-Federal Relations and Veterans’ Affairs Transportation  
Ways and Means

## **Senate Committees**

Capital Budget

Commerce

Education and Workforce Development

Election Law and Municipal Affairs

Energy and Natural Resources

Executive Departments and Administration

Finance

Health and Human Services

Judiciary

Rules and Enrolled Bills

Transportation

Ways and Means

To have the greatest chance of influencing the passage or defeat of a bill, it is important to become involved as early in the process as possible. If your municipality wants to play a leading role in supporting or opposing a bill, you should try to get involved at or before the first committee hearing.

## **Committee Hearing**

The committee hearing is typically your only opportunity to speak to all members of the committee considering a bill. At the hearing, the bill is introduced to the committee by its sponsor. The committee will then listen to testimony from anyone who is interested, beginning with other legislators, then other state officials, and finally the general public (this includes you). Unless someone has special expertise or an important role in the area affected by the legislation (for example, a representative from a state agency that would administer the law), witnesses are strongly encouraged to limit their testimony to a few minutes. If there are many witnesses, or if the hearing has already lasted a long time, you really should limit your testimony to two or three minutes.

In the House, the committee will rarely take any action at the end of the hearing. Instead, it will simply close the hearing and take up the bill at a later date to be determined. If you have missed the hearing, or if you've testified but think of something you want to add later, you can still write an email or letter to the committee or talk to individual committee members.

Senate committees sometimes act on a bill at the close of the hearing, especially if it seems simple and not controversial. For this reason, it is particularly important to be present at a Senate hearing or to contact committee members before the hearing.

## Executive Session

Typically, the bill will go next to an “executive session” of the committee. This is a meeting of the committee that is open to the public, but at which no further testimony is likely to be accepted. It is nevertheless useful to be present when a bill is “executed,” because the committee may ask questions if there are issues it doesn’t understand.

If the bill is fairly straightforward and most committee members are in agreement, the committee may vote then to issue a report recommending passage (“ought to pass”) or defeat (“inexpedient to legislate”) of the bill, and put it on the calendar for action by the full House or Senate. If the bill is complicated or there is substantial disagreement on the committee, a subcommittee may be appointed to study the bill and make a recommendation to the full committee. (This is far more likely to happen in the House than in the Senate.) At any point in this process, the committee may also choose to amend the bill and issue a recommendation of “ought to pass with amendment.”

## Subcommittee

If you know that a subcommittee has been appointed, this is a good opportunity to focus your lobbying efforts on the people who will have the most influence on the bill. The subcommittee will schedule one or more meetings—again, open to the public, but usually without any public testimony. Since you’re unlikely to be permitted to testify at the meeting, it is best to call or write to subcommittee members before the meeting—but it is still advisable to attend the subcommittee meetings if possible.

After one or more meetings, the subcommittee will make a recommendation to the full committee, which will then take up the bill in executive session and issue its report.

## House/Senate Session

When the committee votes to recommend a bill as ought to pass or inexpedient to legislate, it will be placed on the calendar for the next session of the full House or Senate; these sessions are usually held weekly, most often on Wednesday or Thursday. Even if you were not involved at the committee level, it is certainly not too late to contact your own legislators. Since only a small minority of legislators serves on any single committee, the full House or Senate vote is a critical time for members of your legislative delegation to represent you, especially if they are not on the committee that is making a recommendation on the bill.

At the session, the bill’s title is read, the committee gives its report—along with a minority report, if the committee was divided—and the entire body votes. (In the House, committee reports and minority reports are printed in the calendar and are not read on the floor. In the Senate, the procedure is the opposite—the reports are not printed in the calendar, but are delivered orally on the floor by committee members.) Most often the committee’s recommendation is followed, although this is far from a foregone conclusion, especially if the committee was closely divided.

A committee may vote to place a bill on the consent calendar, for either passage or defeat, if it does not anticipate any debate on the floor. Items on the consent calendar are voted on in a single action. At the request of any member, a bill will be removed from the consent calendar and placed on the regular calendar for debate.

Although the process in the House or Senate session is usually fairly predictable, anything can happen. For example, a member may offer an amendment to the bill from the floor; or there could be a motion to table the bill—no reason needs to be stated—thus taking it off the agenda indefinitely. Further, a vote on a bill can be subject to a motion for reconsideration.

If an “inexpedient to legislate” report is adopted, the bill is dead for this session. (In fact, a bill killed by either chamber in the first year of a biennium cannot be re-introduced the next year in the same chamber without a suspension of the rules, so it is effectively dead until the next biennium.) If an “ought to pass” (or “ought to pass with amendment”) report is adopted, the bill goes to the other chamber, where the process begins again. (However, revenue and spending bills may first be referred to the appropriate chamber’s Finance and/or Ways and Means Committee for further action.)

## **Crossover**

Once a bill “crosses over” from one chamber to the other, it goes through the same process in the second chamber. This means there will be a second hearing before a new committee, so you have a second chance to testify (and if you were interested enough to testify the first time, it is equally important to do so the second time). If the second chamber adopts an “inexpedient to legislate” report, the bill is killed. If the second chamber adopts an “ought to pass” report with no amendments to the bill, it moves to the enrolled bills process (discussed below).

Another alternative is that the second chamber may approve the bill, but in a different form (“ought to pass with amendment”) from that approved by the first chamber. When this happens, the amended bill is referred back to the originating body, which can either concur or “nonconcur” with the amendment.

If the originating body concurs with the amendment, the bill moves to the enrolled bills process. If it nonconcur, it can either let the bill die or request a committee of conference.

## **Committee of Conference**

If a committee of conference is requested, the Senate President and the House Speaker will appoint members of the committee from their respective chambers. The committee will then meet to try to agree on one of the versions of the bill, or on a compromise. The members of each chamber on the committee vote as a unit. If the two delegations cannot agree on a final version of the bill, it dies. If they do agree, the agreed version of the bill goes back to each chamber for a vote. If both chambers vote to approve the conference committee’s version of the bill, it goes to the enrolled bills process; if either chamber rejects the bill, it dies. Neither chamber can amend the bill after it emerges from



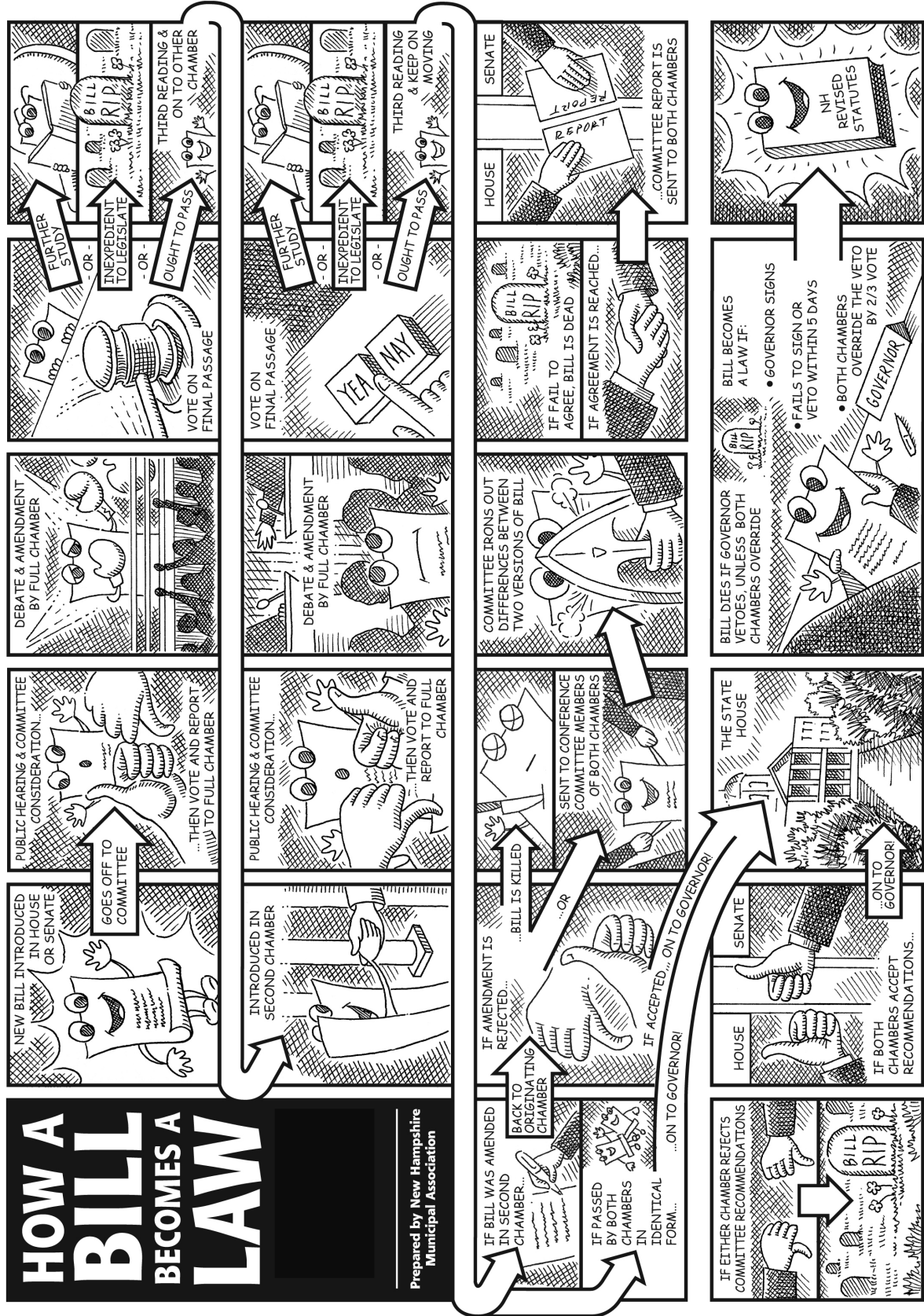
the committee of conference; it can only approve or reject the committee of conference report.

Committees of conference do not accept public testimony. If you are interested in a bill that is in a committee of conference, the best way to influence it is to speak directly to a member of the committee before it meets. A list of committee members will be included in the House calendar (see “Calendar” under Glossary, above), and there will be a link to “Committees of Conference” on the legislature’s website. If you cannot find the information, you can always call NHMA’s Government Affairs staff.

**New Hampshire Municipal Association**

# HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

Prepared by New Hampshire Municipal Association



## Enrolled Bills

When a bill has finally passed the House and Senate in identical form, it goes to Legislative Services, which makes any necessary technical corrections, such as changes to section numbers, and non-substantive grammatical and punctuation corrections. It is then signed by a member of the Senate Rules and Enrolled Bills Committee or the House Enrolled Bills Subcommittee. It now has the status of an “enrolled bill.” The House Speaker and Senate President then sign off on the bill and it is sent to the governor, who may sign it, veto it, or allow it to become law without taking any action on it.

## Bills, Session Laws and Statutes

If a bill makes it all the way through the process to becoming a law, it may have three different designations attached to it along the way. For example, in the 2019 session, HB 700 became Chapter 117, which then was codified in RSA 72:8-d and amended a few other RSA sections. This can be confusing for someone unfamiliar with the process. Here is how it works:

### Bill Number

Throughout the time a bill is being considered by the legislature, it will be referred to by a bill number: for example, HB 765 or SB 442. It will continue to be identified in that manner until the governor signs it or allows it to become law without signing it. The numbering of bills begins anew at the start of each biennium.

### Chapter Number

Every bill that becomes law is immediately designated as a “chapter” in the laws of that legislative session (that is, the session laws). Thus, every law is given a chapter number, in the order that it becomes law: for example, Laws of 2019, Chapter 117. The numbering of chapters begins anew at the start of each session. Once a law is assigned a chapter number, the bill number becomes unnecessary.

### Statute (RSA)

Bill numbers and chapter numbers are used only to track a bill through an annual legislative session. After each session, most (but not all) of the session laws become part of the Revised Statutes Annotated (RSA), the code of all statutes that have been enacted (and not repealed) throughout the state’s history. At this point, the chapter number becomes unnecessary and is of historical interest only. For example, Chapter 117 of the Laws of 2019 became part of an existing statute known as RSA72 for most purposes, there is no longer any reason to refer to the law as “Chapter 117.”

There are, unfortunately, a few laws that inexplicably continue to be commonly referred to by the bill number originally assigned to them, even several years after they were enacted. The most familiar to local officials is SB2, establishing the official ballot form of town meeting, which was enacted in 1995. It makes far more sense to refer to this law as RSA 40:13, which is the statute in which its principal terms were codified—especially since every new biennium will have its own “SB2.”

## Following the Process

The *Legislative Bulletin* keeps you up to date on each week's developments, but if you want to follow a bill more closely, you can (in addition to calling NHMA) check out the legislature's Web site, [www.gencourt.state.nh.us](http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us), which is a wealth of information. In addition to finding information about the House and Senate and about all of the legislators, you can see what's happening with the bill you're interested in. Just go to the home page and type in the bill number under "Find a [current year] Bill" (or use the "Advanced Bill Status Search" link next to that search bar for more advanced features). From there, you can read the bill ("Bill Text") and see where it is in the process ("Docket").

## What NHMA Does

The New Hampshire Municipal Association (NHMA) is a non-partisan, non-profit membership organization of municipalities incorporated in 1941 by a group of selectmen and city officials. NHMA has evolved into a service and action arm for local governments, supporting municipalities in their efforts to provide effective and efficient local government services. Currently, all but one of the 234 New Hampshire cities and towns are members of the association.

Through its legislative advocacy program, NHMA represents municipal interests before the New Hampshire legislature and state agencies, and lobbies on state legislation. In the fall before each new biennium, the NHMA Legislative Policy Conference considers and votes on policy positions that have been raised by municipalities. Every member, regardless of size, is entitled to one vote at the conference. Policy positions approved at the conference guide the actions of the NHMA Government Affairs staff in addressing legislation during the ensuing biennium.

The Government Affairs staff works closely with local officials on legislation affecting municipal interests. Municipal officials who are interested in legislative matters are encouraged to contact NHMA staff at 603.224.7447 or (New Hampshire toll free) 800.852.3358.

Every Friday during the legislative session, NHMA publishes the *Legislative Bulletin*, which contains a listing of bills of municipal interest, a brief analysis of key legislative developments during the past week, a legislative calendar listing municipal bills to be heard in the next two or three weeks, a call to action on scheduled hearings when municipal viewpoints need to be heard and, occasionally, updates on federal issues of interest to municipalities.

The *Bulletin* is the primary legislative communication vehicle between NHMA and its members. It is e-mailed to most members, and can also be found on our Web site, [www.nhmunicipal.org](http://www.nhmunicipal.org). The *Bulletin* highlights policy bills as they move through the legislative process. It also serves as a vehicle for requesting action from you. Typically, these requests are either requests for comments regarding a particular bill's impact on your city or town or requests for letters or phone calls in support of or opposition to a particular bill. The information in the *Bulletin* is time-sensitive, as the legislative process can move very quickly.

# **What You Can Do**

Although the NHMA Government Affairs staff works directly with the legislature on bills, our collective influence is the direct result of your city or town's efforts to make your voice heard in the legislature. That's why it is important for every city and town to play an active, consistent and continuing role in NHMA's legislative effort. The following steps can help you either get started in the lobbying process or make sure you are covering all the bases.

## **1. *Keep well informed.***

Read the *Bulletin* promptly! Information on bills not included in the *Bulletin* can be obtained by calling NHMA at 800.852.3358. The fastest way to obtain copies of bills is through the legislature's Web site, [www.gencourt.state.nh.us](http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us) (type in the bill number on the quick search bar under the "Find a [current year] Bill"; then click on "Bill Text"); or through your own legislator. If that does not work, call NHMA. Request bills by the bill number (HB # for bills originating in the House and SB # for bills originating in the Senate).

## **2. *Put someone in charge.***

Make sure one staff person is responsible for immediate review of the *Bulletin* and for initiating a timely response. During the busiest periods of the legislative session, a response from your community may be needed in less than a week and occasionally in one or two days, so it is important that someone have the responsibility for coordinating your response.

## **3. *Contact your legislators.***

Your representatives need to hear from you, or they're forced to make decisions on important local government issues without knowing the effect they will have on the cities or towns they represent. Many representatives want to hear directly from you and not just from NHMA staff. They will tell their committee when they've heard from "back home." If you are not sure who your legislators are, go to [www.gencourt.state.nh.us](http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us), and click on "House of Representatives." Under "Members," click on "Who's my Legislator."

The importance of contacting a legislator on time cannot be overemphasized. The most eloquent letter or phone call to your legislators does no good if it arrives after a vote. If you have an established position, you should send follow-up letters as requested in the *Bulletin* with little or no delay.

If you are calling your legislator at home, please be sure to call at a convenient time. Some legislators don't mind getting phone calls at 6:30 a.m. or after 9 p.m., but some do. If they do and you choose that time to call, you may have just alienated a valuable ally. If possible, find out in advance—perhaps at a regular meeting with your legislators, see item 10 below—what is the best time to call them.

## **4. *Write letters and testify at hearings.***

For any given piece of legislation, there is a good chance that your senator or representatives will not be on the committee that hears the bill. Contacting your own legislators is always a good

idea—even if they are not on the committee, you can encourage them to go to the committee hearing and testify on behalf of the municipalities they represent—but if your community has a strong interest in a bill, you will also want to get involved directly at the committee level. As soon as you learn about the bill, you should find out what committee it has been assigned to, when it is going to be heard, and who is on the committee. If you can't find this information in the *Bulletin* or obtain the information from the legislature's website, [www.gencourt.state.nh.us](http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us) (type in the bill number on the quick search bar under the "Find a [current year]"), call NHMA. Then write an email or letter to members of the committee and/or plan to testify at the hearing.

**5. *Adopt a resolution.***

Local governing bodies frequently adopt resolutions supporting or opposing legislation and send them to lawmakers. On a particularly important bill, NHMA staff may draft a form of resolution and distribute it to municipalities. If you adopt such a resolution, be sure to customize it—make it a new document, edit it as necessary, and put it on your town or city's letterhead. Don't just fill in the blanks and cross out inapplicable language on the form provided—this makes it appear that no real thought was given to the resolution.

If your council or board has adopted a resolution indicating support for or opposition to a bill, make sure you send a cover letter explaining why you adopted the resolution. A resolution alone is not very effective without the accompanying explanation.

**6. *Be able to act quickly.***

Establish a procedure for urgent (one day) action on bills. Occasionally, a new bill is introduced or an important amendment is proposed that requires an immediate response. The *Bulletin*—or, if the matter is particularly urgent, an e-mailed "Legislative Alert"—will request that you take immediate action, or the NHMA staff may call key officials and ask them to call their legislators right away. In some cases you may not have an established position on the bill. You will need a quick and simple method to get that decision made. Usually the mayor or a member of the board makes the call.

**7. *Follow through.***

Bills are heard before more than one committee as they go through both chambers. Your letters do not follow bills through the legislative process. More importantly, NHMA's and your municipality's position on a specific piece of legislation may change as the bill is amended as it moves through the legislative process. Consequently, it is vital that you continue to respond quickly to requests for emails or letters, even though you already may have written an email or letter earlier in the process.

**8. *If your community has special clout, use it.***

If your legislator is a member of a key committee (for example, Municipal and County Government, Finance, Election Law and Municipal Affairs, etc.) it is especially important that your municipality respond to as many bills listed in the *Bulletin* as possible. If your municipality isn't located in a key committee member's district, you still aren't off the hook; every letter matters.

**9. *Keep NHMA staff informed.***

Always send NHMA copies of your letters. It is extremely helpful to the staff to know to whom you write, when you write, and what you say. If you receive a response from a legislator, let us know about that, too. The Government Affairs staff read your letters and incorporate local circumstances into their testimony and their discussions with legislators.

**10. *Meet regularly with your legislators.***

Your correspondence with your legislators on issues important to your city or town will be more meaningful if you have established an ongoing, personal relationship with them. While you probably run into your legislators at community events, make it a point to meet formally at least once a year with each of your legislators to review key legislative issues. Some local governing bodies meet with their legislators on a monthly basis. (See Holding Legislative Issues Meetings.)

**11. *Take part in NHMA's policy development.***

NHMA positions are adopted by the full membership. If NHMA's policy positions are to continue to be representative of all the cities and towns in New Hampshire, our policies must be made by a large sampling of local officials throughout the state.

# Holding Legislative Issues Meetings

In addition to occasional informal discussions with your legislators and communications on specific legislative items, it is also important to have a more formal, coherent process for your community's leaders to exchange views and concerns with your entire legislative delegation. One of the best ways to do this is to hold legislative issues meetings at least annually. This is an opportunity for legislators to inform you about issues before the legislature and hear your views, and for you to raise issues with them. Such meetings can be held anytime during the year, but if you are going to hold only one meeting per year, the best time is early January, as the legislature is beginning its work for the year. If that is not possible, try working forward or backward from there (but not before the November elections).

It is important to invite your municipality's senator and all of its representatives— not just your favorites—and try to schedule a date that will accommodate all of them. Participants from the municipality should include members of the council or governing board and representatives of any other boards or departments that may have legislative issues. NHMA staff are happy to attend (time permitting), but the discussion should be principally between the local officials and the legislators, since they are more interested in hearing from you.

For the meeting to be as productive as possible, it should not just be an open forum. Both the legislators and the local officials should plan specific topics that they want to address and decide in advance who will present them. It is important that the municipal and legislative representatives coordinate their presentations so both groups will get as much as possible from the meeting. It is helpful if each group knows in advance what issues the other is going to address and has at least a basic understanding of those issues; if people are hearing about issues for the first time at the meeting, most of the time will be spent simply learning about the issues, rather than engaging in useful policy discussions.

The format for the meeting will depend on a number of factors, including the number of people involved, their personalities, political and diplomatic considerations, the number and nature of issues, the time of day and planned duration of the meeting. With that in mind, the following is a very general suggestion of a format for the meeting:

1. Opening remarks by mayor/board chair
2. Introduction of all present
3. Presentation of topics/legislation
4. Allow comments/responses after each item
5. Request for commitment by legislators to support/oppose particular legislation



# **Practical Information About the Legislature**

Testifying at the legislature can be a daunting experience if you have no idea what to expect. Here are some practical tips to help you through the process.

## ***How do I get there?***

The State House is located on Main Street in downtown Concord, between Capitol and Park Streets. The Legislative Office Building (LOB) is directly behind the State House, across State Street—it's the building with the words "United States Post Office/Court House" inscribed above the entrance, although you will find neither a post office nor a courthouse inside. This is not an effort to deceive the public—this was originally the federal building. If you look for it, you will also find a blue sign identifying it as the LOB.

The following directions will take you directly to the State House, but unless you are traveling to Concord on foot or by taxi, you will need to find a place to park, which may involve a few trips around the block. You may want to read *Where do I park?* (page 24) before starting your trip.

## **From Points North**

I-93 south to Exit 14. Turn right at bottom of ramp, go through one light, turn left onto Main Street at second light (Holiday Inn is on the right). Go one block. State House is on the right.

## **From Points South**

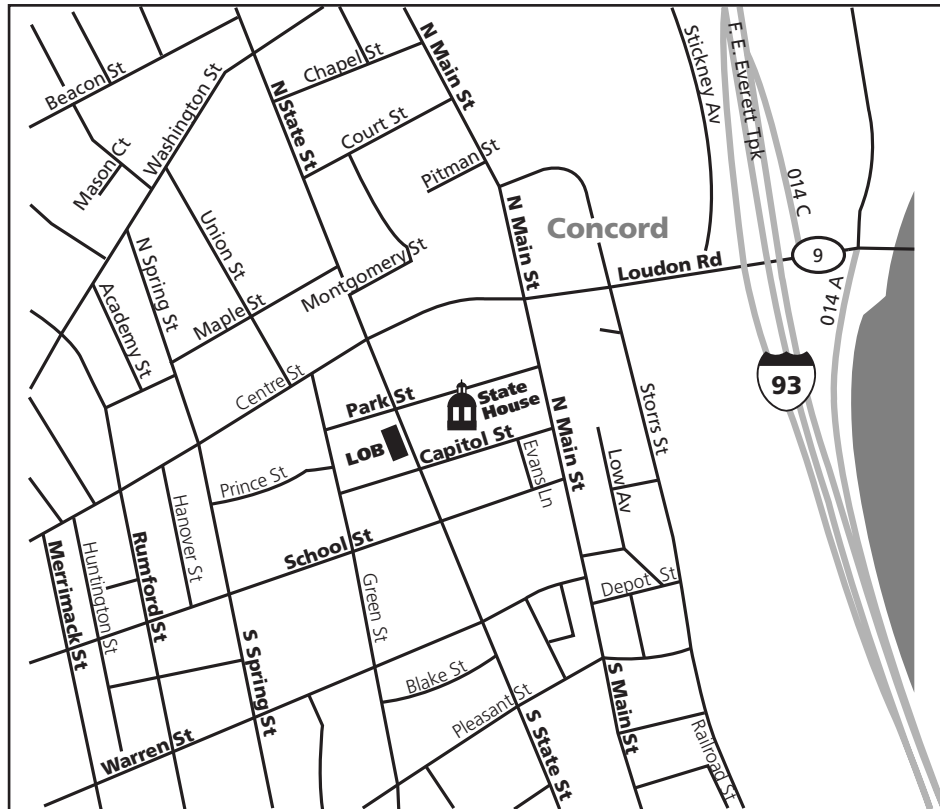
I-93 north to Exit 14. Turn left at end of ramp, go through three lights in quick succession, turn left onto Main Street at fourth light (Holiday Inn is on the right). Go one block. State House is on the right.

## **From Points East**

I-393 west to I-93 south. Follow directions from points north.

## **From Points West**

I-89 south to I-93 north. Follow directions from points south.



### ***Where do I park?***

Finding a place to park will probably be the most unpleasant part of your visit to the legislature. The City of Concord has only 766 on-street metered parking spaces as of July 2019. With a legislative body of 400 and fewer than 400 parking spots in the legislative parking garage, parking can be the most challenging part of your visit. Here are some options:

- There is a municipal parking garage on School Street, between Main and State Streets. (After turning left onto Main Street at the Holiday Inn, take the third right onto School Street, go half a block, and turn left into the parking garage.) Spaces are extremely limited. Be careful that you do not park in a reserved space.
- There is a smaller parking garage on State Street, between School and Warren Streets. (Same as above, but continue up School Street one block to State Street and turn left. Go half a block and turn right.) Again, spaces are limited and be careful that you do not park in a reserved space.
- On-street parking is available, but often very hard to find, in the blocks around the State House. All spaces are metered, and the spaces nearest the State House and the LOB are usually reserved for legislators. Spaces on Main Street have a three-hour limit. Most metered spaces off Main Street have a ten-hour limit. The traffic police are extraordinarily vigilant.
- If you don't mind walking some distance, the best bet is to continue straight across Main Street (instead of turning left onto Main at the Holiday Inn), up Centre Street about four to six blocks until you find an unmetered space either on Centre Street or on a side street (try Spring, Rumford, or Merrimack). Note, however, that the City is expanding its metered parking, so you may have to drive some distance to find free parking.

Do **not** park in the garage at the LOB. That is for legislators and staff only.

Also, feel free to check the City of Concord’s website ([www.concordnh.gov/844/Downtown-Parking](http://www.concordnh.gov/844/Downtown-Parking)) for the most up-to-date information on parking near the State House.

### ***Where is the hearing?***

Most hearings are in the Legislative Office Building, although some are in the State House. The building and room number should be listed in the Bulletin. If you don’t have the Bulletin or the location is not shown, you can find out by checking the legislature’s website, or by calling NHMA’s Government Affairs Office. There are also copies of the House and Senate Calendars at the reception desk in the LOB lobby.

### ***Where should I sit?***

Every hearing room has a row of tables for committee members, a witness table and chair(s), and two or three rows of chairs for everyone else. Take any seat in one of the rows of chairs. Do not sit at any of the tables, even if there are empty chairs. When it is your turn to testify, move to the witness table—front and center.

### ***Do I have to sign up to testify?***

Yes—and that’s one reason you should arrive early. (The other is that seating may be limited, and for particularly controversial bills, you may have trouble even getting into the room.)

For hearings in the Senate, there will be a sign-up sheet. Make sure you sign up for the right hearing! A committee will frequently hold hearings on three or four bills consecutively, and there will be a sign-up sheet for each hearing at the witness’s table. The bill number is shown at the top of each sheet, so be sure to check the number.

For hearings in the House, you must fill out a pink card—usually available on the witness’s table—if you wish to speak. You will need to indicate the bill number and complete the other requested information (including the estimated time you need to speak; again, keep it short—two to three minutes!), then give the card to the committee chairperson or any member of the committee. If you want to record your support for or opposition to the bill, but don’t wish to speak, there is a sign-up sheet for that purpose. Again, make sure you sign the right sheet.

### ***May I submit written testimony?***

Certainly—in fact, committees prefer it, because reading takes less time than listening. However, written testimony is also easier to ignore, so if you have an important point to make, it is recommended that you speak, if only for a minute. You can submit written testimony to supplement your oral testimony. If you do submit written testimony, make enough copies for everyone on the committee.

If you are going to give both written and oral testimony, you should avoid simply reading your written testimony to the committee. Speaking in a more conversational manner is a better way to capture the committee’s attention; and some committee members may remind you that “we can read”—you don’t need to do it for them.

***What if I get there after the hearing starts?***

You can still testify, although it will take a little more effort. At a House hearing, try as discreetly as possible to get a pink card from the witness's table (preferably in between witnesses), fill it out, and hand it to the nearest committee member. At a Senate hearing, the chairperson will already have the sign-up sheet—don't march up and ask for it—but he or she will probably ask at the end of the hearing whether anyone else wishes to testify.

Of course, you can avoid this problem by allowing plenty of time—from the time you get to downtown Concord, figure at least 25 minutes to find a parking space, walk to the LOB, and find the hearing room.

***Where are all the legislators?***

You may be surprised to discover that not all committee members are present. Don't be discouraged. Especially in the Senate, where every member is on several committees, it is not uncommon for committee members to be absent. This is one reason that it's good to submit written testimony—if legislators aren't there to hear your testimony, at least they can read it. Be sure to leave copies of your testimony for any committee members who are absent.

***May I raise my hand to say something while someone else is testifying?***

No!

***If another witness is asked a question, may I blurt out the answer?***

No!

***How long will this take?***

A hearing may last anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours; the average is about a half-hour to an hour. You can get a pretty good sense based on the number of people in the room. At a Senate committee hearing, witnesses generally will be called to testify in the order they've signed up (after any legislators and other state officials have testified), so if you're in a hurry, try to get there early and be among the first to sign. If you're not in a hurry, there's something to be said for letting a few other people sign up first, so you have an idea what the arguments are on both sides.

At a House committee hearing, since everyone signs a separate card rather than a sign-up sheet, there's no telling what the order of testimony will be (except that, again, legislators and other state officials will go first). If you submit the first card, it may end up at the bottom of the stack and you'll testify last; or the chairperson may turn the stack over and start with you.

***Should I be nervous?***

Are you kidding? Compared to running a council or board meeting, this is a walk in the park. Almost all legislators are respectful of witnesses, and if you're testifying about an issue that affects your town, you probably know more about the issue than they do.

# **Contact Information**

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E-mail: [governmentaffairs@nhmunicipal.org](mailto:governmentaffairs@nhmunicipal.org)

Web site: [www.nhmunicipal.org](http://www.nhmunicipal.org)

## **New Hampshire General Court**

Web site: [www.gencourt.state.nh.us](http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us)

Includes listings of all House and Senate members and committees, with mailing addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses. Also includes information about all pending legislation.



## NHMA'S MISSION

Through the collective power of cities and towns,  
NHMA promotes effective municipal government by  
providing education, training, advocacy and legal services.