



Colorado Capitol Citizen Guide

It's Easy. Get involved.

Colorado General Assembly

Our state legislature is referred to as the General Assembly, which includes the **House of Representatives (65 members)** and the **Senate (35 members)**.

It is NOT Congress. Congress is in Washington, D.C.
It is NOT the “state Congress.” There is no such thing.

Getting there...

The Colorado Capitol is located at
200 East Colfax Ave.

Denver, CO 80203

(303) 866-2604



Corner of Colfax and Grant. On-street or Paid parking on Grant and surrounding streets. Enter the Capitol via the north entrance facing Colfax. Go up the outside stairs. You may also enter at the south entrance, which is below the outside stairs. Either way, you will have to go through a metal detector (like at the airport), but they are fast and friendly at the Capitol.

Who are your state legislators?

Visit the web site: <http://www.votesmart.org>

Create an account and the system will display a list of people who represent you in the federal, state, and local government. Make note of your state Representative and state Senator. As a Colorado resident, you have one of each. Who those people are is determined by the address where you are registered to vote (primary place of residence).

There are 65 state House districts, all of which are up for election every two years. There are 35 state Senate districts, which operate on four-year terms, with approximately half of those seats up for election every two years.

Contacting Legislators

Contact Information for the Colorado House, Senate, and committee members:

<http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/clics2014A/cslFrontPages.nsf/HomeSplash?OpenForm>

You can also enter your home address to find your legislators here:

<http://www.colorado.gov/esri/webmaps/my-hood.html?webmap-id=0bbdbd4450154b1c9a9827d21c862dad>

When at the Capitol, look for the free “Pink Sheets” in display racks in public areas. The pink sheet is a tri-fold flyer that provides updated contact information for members of the General Assembly. Need a supply of pink sheets for your advocacy group? Just ask a House or Senate Sergeant for assistance. House Sergeants wear green sport coats, Senate Sergeants wear burgundy sport coats.

Effective communication

Whether on phone, in person, or email, you address the legislator as “Representative” or “Senator.” Remember: they are NOT members of Congress.

- Introduce yourself (I am a parent, I am a business owner, I am your constituent, etc). I am concerned about XX and **I would like to know where you stand on this issue.**
- (Maybe your legislator already knows about this issue, has a stance, FIND OUT first.) Keep your communication polite, concise and thank them for their time. Offer to meet with them, or a staff member or follow up with a phone call for more in depth conversation if needed. Research your topic, be informed. You may want to provide the legislator with a link or printed material to back up your statement.
- Remember, your legislator cannot give you legal advice but CAN vote Yes or No on a bill.

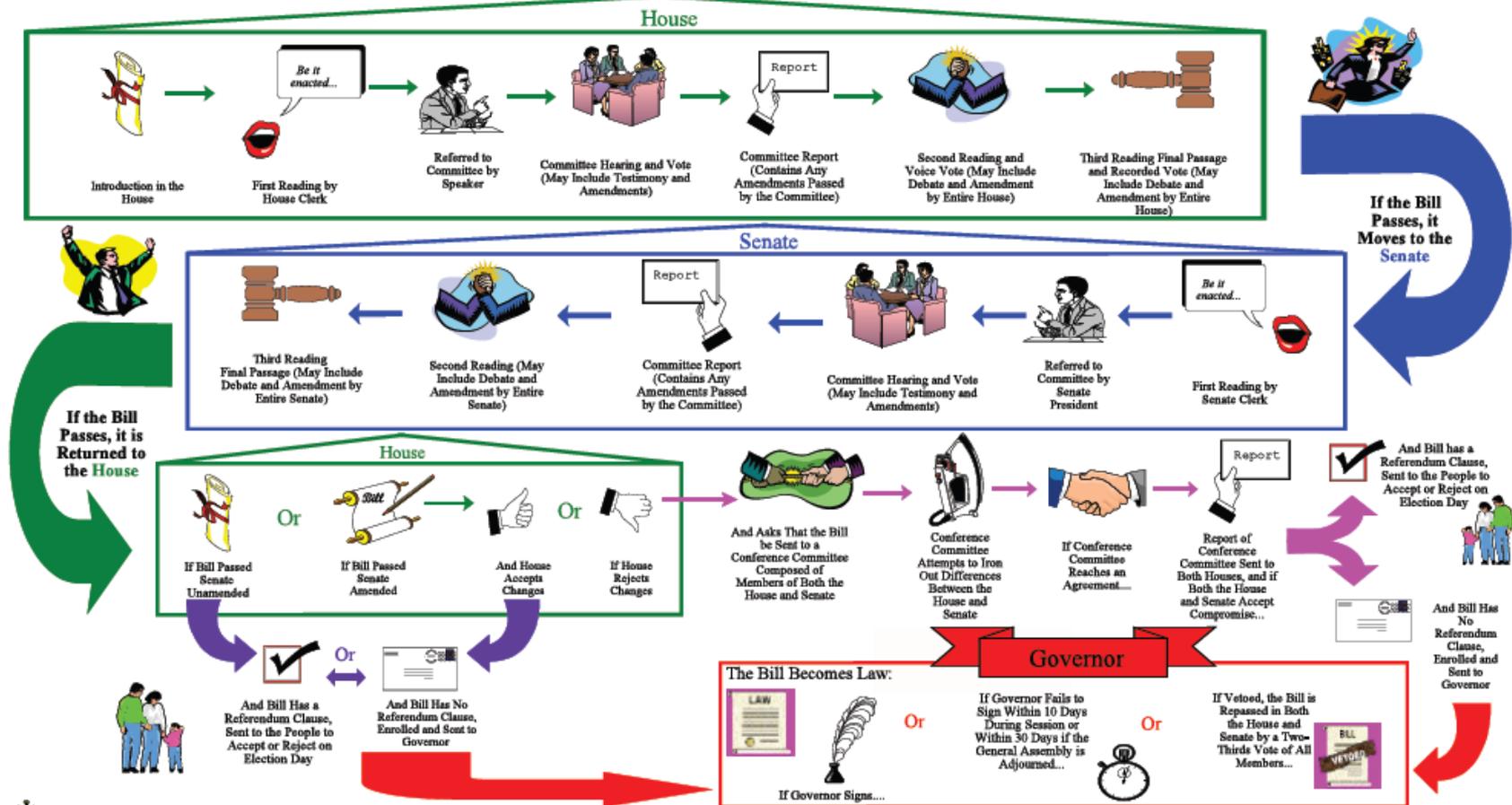
Ask questions.

Whatever issue or bill you are advocating for or against, consider that your objective is to secure votes for your position; not to inform people about the issue or bill. It is common for citizen advocates to skip ahead and to focus on explaining why our position is the right one.

You will empower yourself by asking questions. Ask the legislator if he/she is familiar with the issue or bill and, if so, ask how he/she intends to vote. Knowing whether the legislator is for, against, or undecided on the issue or bill would enable you to proceed more effectively.

Thank those who agree with your position. Make note of those who oppose your position and resist the temptation to argue. Finally, inform those who are unfamiliar or undecided about the issue/bill. Again, it is common for citizen advocates to focus on explaining why our position is the right one. It is more effective to start by asking questions and to then respond accordingly.

How a Bill Becomes Colorado Law*



* Assumes Bill is a House bill, a Senate Bill Follows a Similar Process Beginning in the Senate

Legislation 101-Life of a bill

- Bills are introduced beginning in January. Each bill is given a Number. House bills have four digit numbers, Senate bills have three digit numbers. Those bill numbers are preceded by the two-digit year during which the bill is introduced: HB14-1202, SB14-204
- Bill is introduced and assigned to one or more committees. See list of committees here: <http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite?c=Page&childpagename=CGA-LegislativeCouncil%2FCLCLLayout&cid=1245677985421&pagename=CLCWrapper>
- Public comment and **testimony** on bill. The bill can be amended, passed, or “killed” by each committee to which it is assigned. A simple majority vote of each committee is required for the bill to pass.
- If a bill is passed by the final committee to which it is assigned, it then moves to the floor of that chamber (House or Senate).
- If a bill receives simple majority support or more of the first chamber (33 or more of 65 in the House or 18 or more of the 35 in the Senate), then the bill moves to the second chamber where the process repeats.
- If a bill receives simple majority support or more of the second chamber, then the bill moves to the Governor for final approval or veto.
- If the Governor vetoes a bill, then a $\frac{2}{3}$ majority vote by the House (43 or more) and the Senate (24 or more) can overturn a veto.

Testifying on a bill-Yes YOU Can!

- When a bill is introduced by a legislator, it is assigned to one or more small committees. This is when citizens are allowed to comment (testify) on the bill. Bill schedules are posted and updated frequently on this calendar. <http://www.leg.state.co.us/CLICS/CLICS2015A/csl.nsf/Calendars?OpenFrameSet>
- You will generally have only 3 minutes to testify. Prepare your comments (you can read it), bring any handouts you want to share and then testify with other community members and parents. (You will need to sign-in with the Sergeant of Arms, stating whether you are testifying for or against the bill. The chair of the committee will call your name from the list when it is your turn to testify.)
- There will be a small table with a microphone where you will sit while testifying. Legislators may ask you questions, this is a good thing! More time to talk! Just relax and tell them your thoughts. YOU are the expert.

Testifying on a bill-Yes YOU Can!

- Read the bill before you testify.
- Point to specifics in the bill that you support or oppose.
- Avoid repeating what others have already said about the bill.
- Members of the committee may ask you questions. You won't be under oath, but do try to answer truthfully. It's okay to say "I don't know."
- The Committee Chairman runs the show. He or she is in charge and has the final say. Address the person who is chairing the hearing as "Mr. Chairman" or "Madam Chairman."
- Committee members will direct any questions they have through the Chairman. The Chairman will then call on you. Respond to the Chairman, not the Committee Member.
- When the Chairman excuses you, conclude by saying, "Thank you Mr. /Madam Chair and members of the Committee."

How to find a bill

There are several ways to find or track a bill

(by bill number or bill sponsor)

- Chalkbeat Ed bill tracker <http://co.chalkbeat.org/education-bill-tracker-2015/#>
- Colorado Capitol Watch http://www.coloradocapitolwatch.com/search5/all_bills_srch.php#
- General Assembly bill folders <http://www.leg.state.co.us/CLICS/CLICS2015A/csl.nsf/MainBills?OpenFrameSet>
- Listen to live or archived bill testimony here <http://www.leg.state.co.us/clics/cslFrontPages.nsf/Audio?OpenPage>

Thank you... and some advice

- It is VERY important to come to the Capitol and testify on bills. Legislators do listen and your input can make a difference. We need your voice! THANK YOU.
- Committee hearings will have a publicly noticed start time. However, since our state Constitution provides for public testimony, there is no way for the General Assembly to know how long each bill hearing will last. Therefore, there is no scheduled end time for a bill hearing. How long a hearing lasts depends on how many people want to testify and how many questions are asked by members of the Committee.
- Arrange car pools, have a parent assigned to watch groups of kids after school so that other parents can go testify. Ask a friend who has testified before to practice with you so you won't be nervous.
- Do plan on it taking a while, in case they get behind schedule. Bring a water bottle and snack. (No food or drink allowed inside committee room but you may step out to the hall to grab a snack.) There is a small cafeteria in the basement of the Capitol (and also restrooms).
- When parking at the Capitol, consider that hearings can last several hours.
- Have Questions? ASK! Send an email to coloradokey@gmail.com These parents have testified and will be glad to walk you through it.

Contacting legislators during a Committee Hearing or on the Floor

Teams of Sergeants are available to assist you. House Sergeants wear green sport coats, Senate Sergeants wear burgundy sport coats. One or more Sergeants will be on duty when a Committee meets in a Hearing Room. A group of Sergeants will be on duty in the respective chamber lobby when members are meeting on the floor of the House or Senate.

Work through the Sergeants when a legislator is seated in Committee or on the floor of the House or Senate. You can hand a business card or note to a Sergeant and ask that it be delivered to a legislator. Write the legislator's title and last name on one side with your name on the other side. You can add a note explaining what you would like to discuss. You might also include your phone number in case the legislator is unable to talk with you at that moment. If you are a constituent of that legislator (meaning that you live in the district that he/she represents), then make note of that fact. The Sergeant will deliver your card/note to the legislator **when it is permitted under the rules**.

Generally, the legislator will come out to talk with you when he/she is able. However, keep in mind that during committee hearings and floor proceedings, legislators are constantly juggling what they need to do right then AND preparing for what comes next. It may not be obvious as to how busy he/she is at that moment. Don't be offended if a legislator does not leave a Committee hearing or the floor of the House/Senate to talk with you.

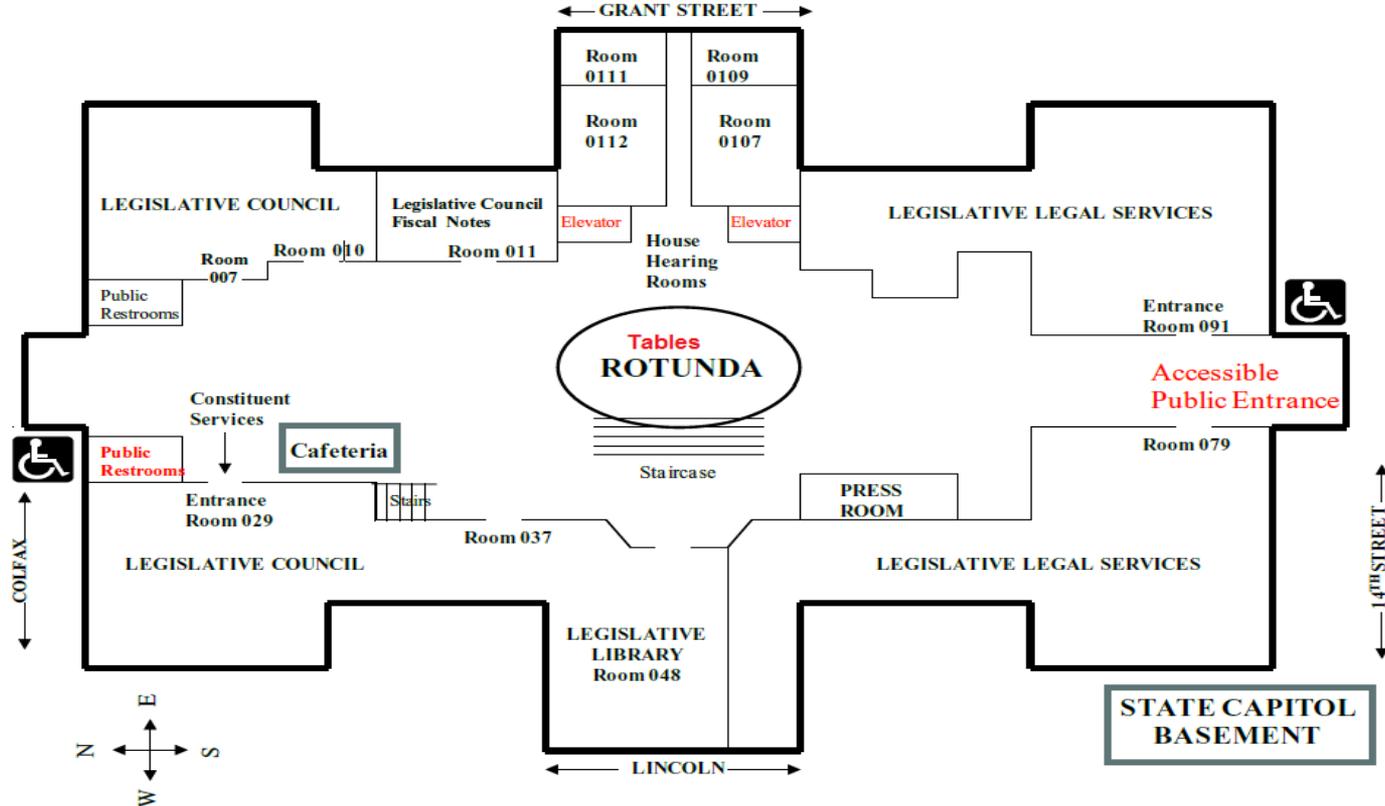
Contacting legislators at their Capitol office

Each member of the Colorado General Assembly has an office, which is either located in the Capitol building or at 1525 Sherman Street, directly northwest of the Capitol across Colfax Avenue. In the Capitol, legislator offices are located on the second and third floors. In the Sherman Street building, legislator offices are located on the sixth and seventh floors. During the legislative session, a receptionist is stationed on the sixth floor of the Sherman Street office building to assist you in contacting members who office in that building.

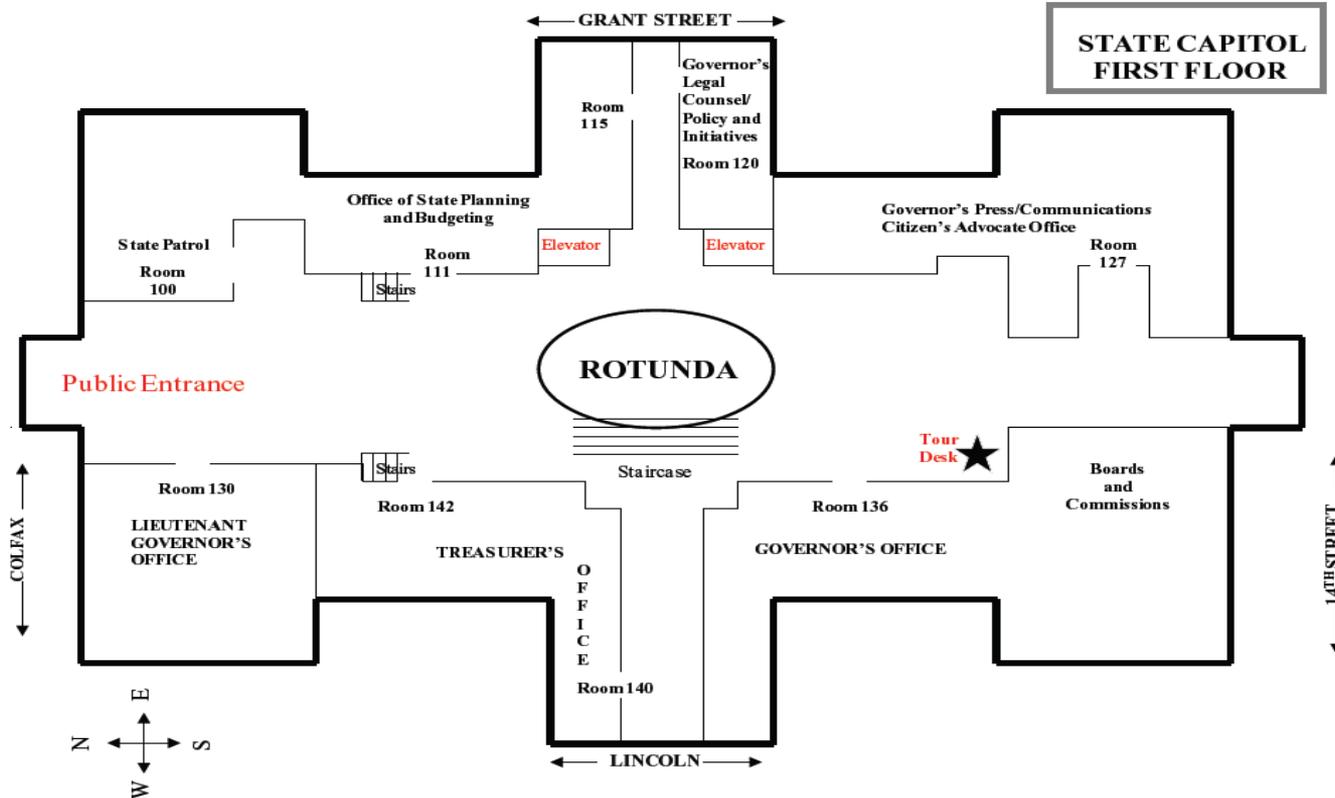
Unlike members of Congress who have extensive staff support, members of the Colorado General Assembly generally have one part-time legislative aide. Members who serve in various leadership positions may have more staff, but the majority of members have just that one, part-time staffperson. Get to know the legislative aides who work for your state Representative and your state Senator. Those two people can be of great help in facilitating communications with the member for whom they work.

Keep in mind that, during the legislative session, a state legislator is NOT in control of his/her schedule. He/she reports to the Capitol each legislative day at a publicly-noticed start time. From there, the legislator has no control over when floor proceedings or committee hearings will end. Members who serve on three or more committees may have no time during the week that can be reliably blocked off for meetings. Do not be offended if a legislative aide or a member of the General Assembly is unable to schedule a meeting with you during the legislative session. If that occurs, then use the business card/note process with the Sergeants to contact the member when he/she is in committee or on the floor.

Floor plan of Capitol - Basement



Floor plan of Capitol- First floor



Floor plan of Capitol-Second floor

