

Public Participation Guide

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Photo by Dolores Michels



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TRACKING A BILL

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To search for bills on the [General Assembly's website](#), enter the specific bill number (e.g. HB 31) into the search bar located in the top right corner. For a broader search on bills pertaining to specific policy areas, enter a keyword (e.g. education) to view all bills that contain that keyword. A detailed guide on searching bills can be found at this [link](#). A comprehensive list of bills for each General Assembly can be found on the [All Legislation](#) page, and filters on the left-hand side of the website can aid in narrowing a bill search. Bills are named based on the Legislative Chamber (House or Senate) where they were introduced with a corresponding number. Bill numbers can be reused each General Assembly, so be sure to search within the correct General Assembly by updating the "Years" search filter when looking for a specific bill. At the bottom of each bill page, there is data on amendments, committee reports, roll calls, and previous actions taken on the bill.

HOW TO LOCATE A COMMITTEE'S SCHEDULE

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The General Assembly's committees typically meet through a prearranged hearing schedule. If there is a specific committee of interest, it can be found [here](#) along with its schedule, members, and bill information. Additionally, the legislature releases a regularly updated [schedule](#) of committee meetings to be held during session. The location of a committee meeting is usually in a designated room at Legislative Hall or the Tatnall building. A summary of each meeting room location can be found [here](#). However, Senate committees can meet virtually via Zoom as well. The Chair of the committee will announce each bill and the sponsor of the bill will address the committee, explaining the purpose of the bill and answering any questions. After hearing from the sponsor, the Chair will acknowledge public testimonies.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN COMMITTEE HEARINGS

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Members of the public can participate in committee hearings by:

- In-person public comment
- Remote public comment via Zoom or phone
- Written public comment via email

REMOTE PUBLIC COMMENT

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One advantage of remote public comment is that it can be delivered from a location convenient for the individual. Both Chambers broadcast the meeting on the General Assembly's website. To access the broadcast, click on [Committees](#) located at the top of the General Assembly's website, find the committee you're interested in, and click on the "View Notice" link. Under "Virtual Meeting Info", there is a meeting live stream link for Senate, House, and Joint committee meetings. The public can participate in House committee meetings by dialing a call-in number and entering the password found on the committee's meeting notice that is also located under the "Virtual Meeting Info" section. For Senate committee meetings, the public can participate by clicking the "Register for Meeting" Zoom link located under the "Virtual Meeting Info" section of the meeting notice. Select "yes" on giving public comment and list the bills you plan to speak on. You will then receive a confirmation email with a link to the Zoom meeting. It is important to ensure your internet connection, audio, and devices are functioning properly before participation on Zoom.

TIPS FOR BETTER REMOTE CONNECTION QUALITY

- ✓ To reduce background noise, use a wired headset and microphone.
- ✓ Test your audio and video in the "settings" menu
- ✓ Limit other browsing activity and turn off notifications

- ✓ If your connection is unstable, try using the “dial-in” feature for audio, found in the link for the meeting. This will trigger a call to your phone to be used as a microphone rather than your computer.

SUBMITTING WRITTEN PUBLIC COMMENT (EMAIL)

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Written comment is another means to provide input on proposed bills. They can strengthen the perspectives of decision makers by supplying factual and anecdotal evidence. To submit a written remark to a House Committee, email HouseCommitteeComment@delaware.gov. Specify the committee title, date of the committee meeting, and bill number you are commenting on. Submissions are accepted in advance of the hearing and up to 24 hours after its completion. Comments received after a hearing will be memorialized into the public record.

The process for submitting written comments to a Senate Committee differs. Locate the committee hearing on the legislature’s website, look under the “Meeting Info” header, and under “Downloads” there will be a PDF for the meeting notice. The document will explain which staffer to send public comment to. If for some reason there is no information, please contact the Chair of the Committee. Public comment will be accepted before the committee meeting and up to 24 hours after its adjournment. Comments received will be considered a part of the official record.

INFORMATION ON JOINT COMMITTEES

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- Capital Improvement (Bond) Committee
 - a. Livestream: General Assembly [Watch & Listen](#)
 - b. Questions about public comment can be sent to the Office of the Controller General
- Joint Finance Committee
 - a. Livestream: <https://legis.delaware.gov/WatchAndListen>
 - b. Public Commenters may pre-register
 - c. Written comments can be emailed to: JFC_Public_Comment@delaware.gov
- Joint Legislative Oversight and Sunset Committee
 - a. [Meeting postings](#) can be found under the “committees” tab in the homepage of the General Assembly, and then under the “joint” section, find “Legislative Oversight and Sunset Committee.” At the bottom of the page, you will find all meetings of the JLOSC. To view the live stream, click on “view notice,” and you will be directed to a new page, where you can click on “[meeting live stream](#).”
 - b. Written comments can be emailed to: Sunset@Delaware.gov
- Legislative Council
 - a. Livestream: General Assembly [Watch and Listen](#)
 - b. Questions and comments can be sent to legislative.council@delaware.gov
 - c. May also call the Division of Research at (302) 744-4114

HELPFUL TIPS FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN COMMITTEE HEARINGS

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- Begin your remarks with a statement along the lines of "Mr. or Madam Chair ____, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is ____, representing ____, and I am here to support/oppose this bill because . . ."
- Be brief with your statement, focusing on points that have not already been mentioned. Typically, 2 to 5 minutes is given for each testimony. Do not be offended if you are asked to conclude your remarks if you exceed the time limit set by the committee.

- At the conclusion of your remarks, thank the committee members and offer to answer any questions they may have.
- If a member asks a question, wait for the chair to prompt you, then respond with "Chair ____, Senator/Representative ____, the answer to your question is . . .". If you do not know the answer, it is perfectly fine to be transparent and offer to follow up with them later.
- Be prepared for committee members to come and go during a hearing due to other commitments.
- The Chair of the committee has the authority to limit testimony and remove any disruptive individual from the meeting.
- If you are participating in the public comment process remotely or in-person, supplement your verbal remarks with written remarks through email for the committee.

PROCEDURES FOR SPEAKING ON THE HOUSE AND SENATE FLOOR

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While any member of the public may testify in *committee meetings*, one must be requested to testify before the *floor* of either the House or Senate by a member of that chamber and with the consent of House Speaker and President of the Senate. Witnesses come before legislators to be recognized, to discuss general subject matter, or comment on a specific bill. This happens if a member of the General Assembly requests privilege of the floor for you to do so. Once the request is granted to the legislator by the presiding officer, the witness should move to the podium (or remote screen).

Any member of the public is allowed to observe the conduct of business of the House or Senate by accessing the balcony located on the second floor of the Legislative Hall building. While the House or Senate is in session, members of the public are not allowed to talk on the phone or any other communication device, and all phones need to be muted.

FAQs

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF A COMMITTEE?

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The full General Assembly may not have the capacity to examine an issue close enough to construct a meaningful policy choice. Therefore, committees provide a detailed review of proposed legislation and conduct special investigations. The members of a committee become knowledgeable sources pertaining to issues assigned to them. Likewise, it provides a chance for the public and expert witnesses to present their perspectives as well, and better inform the General Assembly. Ultimately, the committee determines if the proposal should move forward in the legislative process.

WHAT IS THE PROCEDURE THAT TYPICALLY OCCURS DURING COMMITTEE?

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Committee procedures may differ depending on whether it is a House or Senate committee. However, a typical agenda is as follows:

1. Approval of previous meeting minutes.
2. Review of each bill (*may be out of order compared to what is listed on the agenda*). Review consists of:
 - a. Remarks from the sponsor and discussion of the bill by the committee members.
 - b. Public testimony on the bill. If participating remotely, pre-registered individuals usually go first, then non-registered.
 - c. Vote or signing of the bill out of committee.
3. Adjournment.

HOW DO I CONTACT A LEGISLATOR?

The General Assembly website provides a list of legislators in the [House](#) and [Senate](#) on the main page. Each legislator has a phone number and email listed, which can be used to request an in-person appointment as well. Additionally, you can periodically check for upcoming Town Hall Meetings as most legislators use these meetings as an avenue for discussing current issues that are facing their constituents. In any format, be well prepared for your discussion, ready and willing to answer any questions, and be brief and specific with your comments. For questions about a committee hearing or bill, please contact the chair of the committee. If you have broader concerns that you would like to discuss, please use the “Find my Legislator” box on the main website and contact your Representative or Senator.

HOW DOES THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS WORK?

Committee hearings and public input are one step in the legislative process. The legislative process for Delaware is explained in this [diagram](#).

FOR ALL OTHER QUESTIONS

Email: LC_reception@delaware.gov

Call: (302) 744-4114