

How a Bill Becomes a Law

February 12, 2009

The Work of the Legislature and Your Role In It

The Florida Legislature opens the first Monday of March each year. Prior to that time hundreds of bills are introduced by individual Senators and Representatives, and by committees of the Senate and House frequently with input from government agencies. Bills are subjected to all kinds of scrutiny and debate. Some are killed by committees and never reach the floor for a vote. Some are expanded to include all sorts of other items. Some are attached to other bills.

If a bill is passed by either of the Houses of the Legislature, but there is no companion bill in the other House, it goes nowhere. This is often where the Senate and the House do their battles as they dicker back and forth over what final shape a particular bill will take. This is where there can be a good deal of horse trading, with the Senate, for instance, holding back on a bill that House wants until the House promises to do what the Senate wants on one of its bills. Knowledge of what the Governor will or will not do on a particular issue also plays a big part in how a bill passes through the Legislature.

If he makes it known that he will veto a particular bill, and if there are not enough estimated votes to override a veto, a particular bill begins to lose its steam and its support.

Add to this process a whole host of lobbyists and special interest groups and you have a wild ride for about nine weeks in Tallahassee. A sleepy town becomes wide awake.

After a bill is passed by both the Senate and the House, the Governor has the choice to let it die through inaction, or he can kill it by vetoing it, or he can sign it into law. After a bill is signed into law, the agency with the responsibility to implement the law will often have to write a rule enabling it to implement the law. Here is where legal counsel comes into the picture. What is constitutionally allowed? Does the rule overstep its bounds and go beyond the purview of the law? During the period of time rules are being written, they are often circulated around the state for input by those it will impact to see if it is workable or not. Legal counsel comes from department attorneys and in some cases by attorneys employed by those who will be impacted by a particular rule.

CSF and FAANS become involved at two points. First, if we hear of a legislator or a committee that is working on a potential bill that will impact our schools, we attempt to give input and become part of the process before the bill is actually written and filed. If a bill is filed that we have problems with, we then begin to work with friends in the legislature to either kill the bill or amend it. If a bill is passed by the House that is bad for schools, we then attempt to kill or modify it in the Senate. If a bad bill makes it all the way through and is passed by both houses, we would attempt to persuade the Governor to veto the bill.

If that fails, we can still seek to participate in shaping the rule or rules that will be written to implement the new law.

All through the process your participation is important through telephone calls, email messages, faxes, or even personal visits to your local Senator or Representative. ***So please be ready to act when asked you to do so.***

NEWS

Christian Schools
of
Florida



Web Sites To Assist You

If you want to refresh your memory about how an idea becomes a law:

<http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/FileStores/Web/HouseContent/Approved/Public%20Guide/Uploads/Documents/How%20an%20Idea%20Becomes%20a%20Law%202008-2010.pdf>

If you want to read a particular bill that has been filed, you can do so at the Homepage of the Senate or House, wherever it was filed. All bills filed are placed immediately on the House or Senate homepage. After finding the bill, you can read its content, you can follow its path through the process, you can find amendments made, and then its final disposition. "HB" means a bill was filed in the House. "SB" means it was filed in the Senate. "CB" means it is coming out of a committee.

- Florida House of Representatives Website: <http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/default.aspx>
- Florida Senate Website: <http://www.flsenate.gov/Welcome>

Tracking Bills

Keeping track of all the bills is a difficult task. Keeping track of amendments, committee hearings, and meeting with individual legislators requires people in Tallahassee who are very informed, effective in what they do, and well respected in the Legislature. There are three lobbyists working in Tallahassee in support of the non public schools. FCIS, CSF, and two other agencies hire Brenda Dickinson to do this. The Florida Catholic Conference and FACCS also have lobbyists. All three attempt to work in concert so that all the bases are covered and that someone is at the many committee hearings.