Working with Legislators

Resource from the National Conference of State Legislatures on Learning the Game

[Image]

Legislative Process

Here is the way the state legislative game is supposed to work: 1) a bill is introduced; 2) the bill is assigned to a committee; 3) following hearings, the committee votes to kill the bill or send it to the House or Senate for debate; 4) legislators debate the bill’s merits, and vote it up or down; 5) if it is approved, the bill then goes to the other chamber, where the process is repeated; 6) if the bill is amended during consideration by the second chamber, it goes to a conference committee to resolve the differences between the two chambers; 7) the governor signs the bill and it becomes law, or the governor vetoes the bill; if it is vetoed, the legislature may sustain the governor’s veto or override it. Those are the basic steps—with variations—that are followed in every state except Nebraska, where there is one chamber rather than the customary two.

What has been outlined is a rational process. In practice, however, legislative proposals—that is, bills—rarely follow a smooth path to enactment. Missing from the preceding list of steps in the legislative game