

PROACTIVE LEGISLATIVE MANUAL



**Ohio Coalition for the Education
of Children with Disabilities**

Revised Edition April 2015

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this publication is to enable organizations and individuals to have a voice in the democratic process on a proactive basis. To have a positive effect on programs for children and adults with disabilities, it is necessary to know the avenues for change. This publication is a quick, reliable source to help you in your efforts to affect this change by communicating your concerns to members of the Ohio General Assembly.

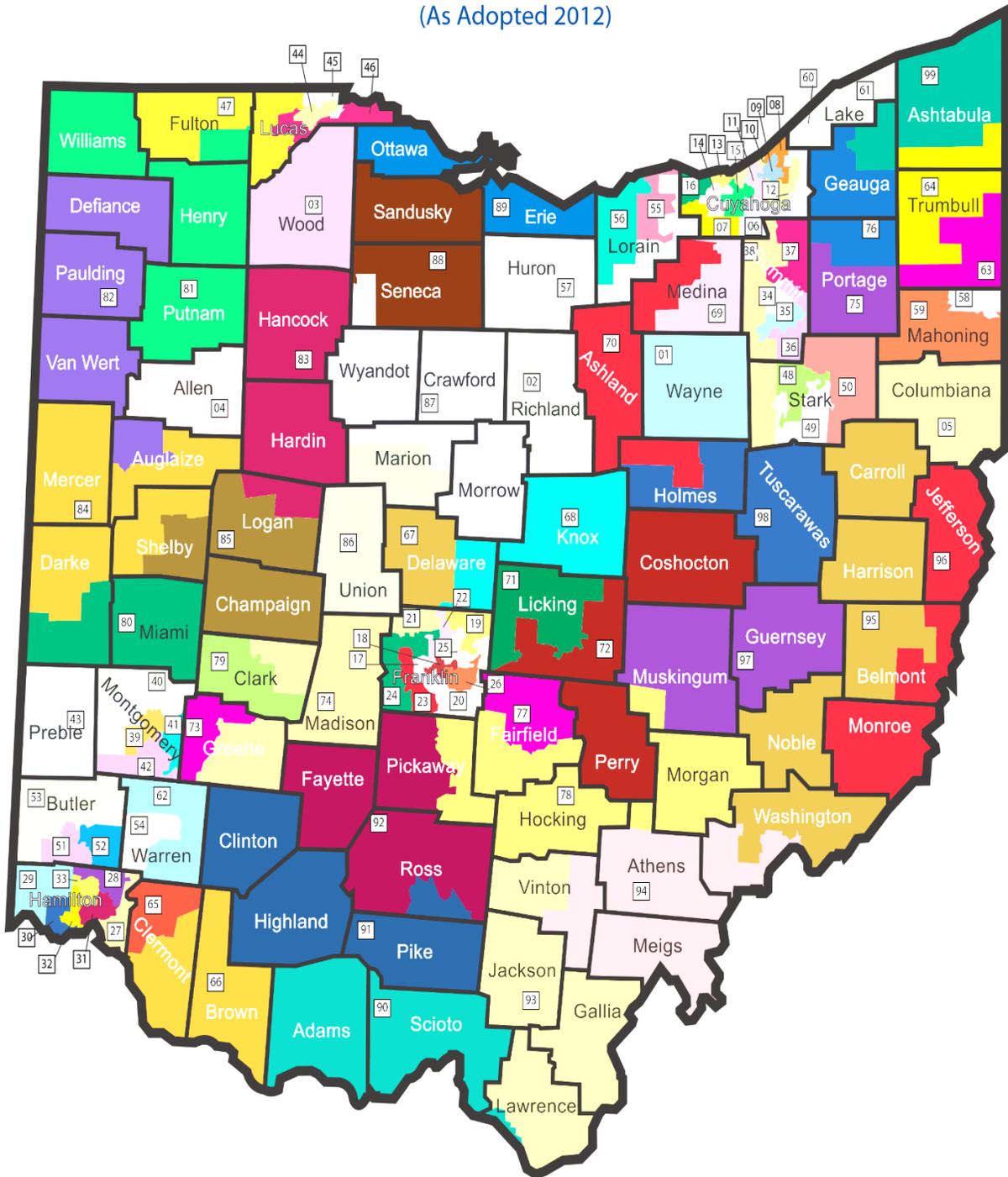
CREDIT

The Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities at this time wishes to thank and credit the Ohio House of Representatives and the Ohio Senate for their information and assistance.



Ohio House Districts 2012-2022

(As Adopted 2012)



Ohio Senate Districts 2012-2022

(As Adopted 2012)



A SUMMARY OF LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY: WHEN TO DO WHAT

WHAT / WHEN	If You Are Creating and Trying to Have an Impact on Your Own Bill	If You Are Trying to Have an Impact on a Bill You Have Not Created
Approximately Six to Nine Months Before The Legislative Session	<p>Discuss with key members of your group the specific legislative proposal to be worked on.</p> <p>Begin drafting the legislation or at least outlining ideas so that the Legislative Service Commission will have a foundation to draft from.</p>	<p>Try to explore the bill drafting that is going on throughout the state in your area of interest.</p> <p>Legislative Service Commission-see “Resources” on page 21.</p>
Approximately Four to Six Months Before The Legislative Session	<p>Recruit a legislator to take either the draft or outline of your bill to the Legislative Service Commission.</p> <p>Identify the potential proponent and opponent constituencies for your bill.</p>	<p>Determine upcoming bills that you will advocate for or against.</p> <p>Identify who you will probably be working with and against.</p>

Identify the decision-makers in the legislature (legislators, officials, party leaders) and learn how to reach each of them.

Assess the numbers, resources, time, and energy of your citizens' group. Determine what your group will be able to do.



<p style="text-align: center;">WHAT</p> <p style="text-align: center;">WHEN</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">If You Are Creating and Trying to Have an Impact on Your Own Bill</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">If You Are Trying to Have an Impact on a Bill You Have Not Created</p>
<p>Approximately Two to Four Months Before The Legislative Session</p>	<p>Select sponsors for your legislation, and try to get early commitments from other legislators.</p>	
<p>Approximately Three Months Before The Final Vote in The Legislature is Anticipated</p>	<p>Arrange visits with decision-makers in the legislature to let them know about your interests and to ascertain their viewpoints.</p> <p>If it is an election year, arrange meetings with winners and enlist their support.</p> <p>Obtain commitments from allies and form coalitions if possible.</p> <p>If a coalition has been formed, have a general briefing session for members, and set up a communications network.</p> <p>Concentrate on the sources and kinds of opposition you will be facing. Prepare statements to counter expected arguments from the opposition, and publicize them before the opposition surfaces publicly.</p> <p>Make a preliminary head count based on what you know so far.</p> <p>Develop your grassroots and advocacy strategy.</p> <p>If it will serve your purposes, establish media contacts and keep the media informed.</p> <p>Start lining up endorsers from the community.</p> <p>Contact individuals and organizations who may be able to influence certain legislators.</p>	

<p style="text-align: center;">WHAT</p> <p style="text-align: center;">WHEN</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">If You Are Creating and Trying to Have an Impact on Your Own Bill</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">If You Are Trying To Have an Impact on a Bill You Have Not Created</p>
<p>Approximately Two Months Before The Final Vote in The Legislature is Anticipated</p>	<p>If you have previously contacted the media, use these contacts to intensify public education on the issue and urge public support.</p> <p>If you feel the timing is right, begin to activate some of your grassroots strategies.</p> <p>Maintain regular contact with legislators.</p>	
<p>Approximately One Month Before The Final Vote in The Legislature is Anticipated</p>	<p>Pursue your grassroots advocacy activities.</p> <p>Update your head count at least weekly.</p> <p>Go after further media coverage if you feel it will benefit your cause.</p> <p>If you have recruited prominent endorsers, keep them in the public eye.</p> <p>Stage a big event if you feel it will help.</p>	
<p>Approximately One Week Before The Final Vote in The Legislature is Anticipated</p>	<p>Keep in close touch with others on your side of the issue.</p> <p>Organize your last grassroots advocacy blitz.</p> <p>Stick with your formal legislative advocacy efforts, meeting with legislators on a one-to-one basis.</p> <p>Update your head count daily.</p> <p>If it will help your cause, intensify public information efforts through the media. Keep on top of the plans of influential legislators who will carry the debate for your side of the issue on the floor.</p>	



GRASSROOTS ACTIVITIES

LETTER-WRITING CAMPAIGNS

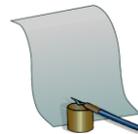
Some people may hesitate to write letters to their legislators because they think that the opinion of the average person can do little to influence the course of government. However, they are wrong. Most legislators highly regard the views of their constituents, and they really do welcome letters.

There can be no guarantee that every letter will result in the desired action, but it is still worthwhile for people who have well-formulated views that they can explain clearly to write to the appropriate legislators. The letters may be interpreted as a measure of interest, or they may aid the legislators in achieving a sound decision.

A good letter represents a carefully reasoned analysis of why a decision, one way or another, would be desirable. Letters of this kind are particularly likely to be influential if they come from a legislator's own constituents. Sometimes, however, the most important legislator to influence is not your own. If this is the case, write to that legislator.

Letters are also likely to be influential if they arrive at the "right" time, such as when legislation is being drafted, when hearings are being held, or when a vote is pending on the floor.

The Format and Content of the Letter



The letter you write should be properly addressed. Your return address should always be included and you should always write legibly.

The letter should be personal-on your own stationery-and cover a subject that you, of course, are interested in and have sufficient knowledge about. In writing the letter, you should be as brief as possible and get right to the point. Be sure to tell the legislator in the letter not only what you would like the legislator to do but also why you think the legislator should do it. If personal experiences or editorials from local papers are relevant, do not hesitate to mention or include them. Also, if you have specialized knowledge, share that with the legislator. Be modest and polite. Without pretending to have vast influence, identify with a group, if possible, and with a cause as well. If you are a constituent, say so. If you supported or voted for the legislator, you might say that also.

The letter should end by urging the legislator to support your views and by thanking the legislator for giving your correspondence attention.

Some Letter Writing Don'ts

- Don't be abusive or threatening.
- Don't expect much impact from a form letter.
- Don't begin on the righteous note of "As a citizen and a taxpayer...". The legislator already assumes that of the person writing.
- Don't apologize for writing and taking up the legislator's time. A legislator who feels you are taking up time should not be a legislator and probably will not remain one for long.
- Don't send a printed copy to a Senator when you have written to a Representative or vice versa.
- Don't forget to write your legislator when the legislator does something you approve of.
- Don't postpone writing.

TELEPHONE CAMPAIGNS

Under certain circumstances, such as when personal visits are not feasible and letter writing or telegram campaigns are unreliable, you may decide to urge citizens to telephone their legislators.

Legislators can be contacted by telephone at their district offices (if they have them) or at their Columbus offices. They can also be contacted through Legislative Information at 1-800-282-0253. The procedure is simple – just leave a message containing your name, area code, and phone number where you can be reached.; the legislator you wish to speak to; the topic or number of the bill you wish to talk about; and the general time you will be available at the number you have given. The legislator will then return the call.

When talking to a legislator, it is important to identify yourself (your name and home city), to state your business and questions in a brief and specific manner, to pay attention to what the legislator has to say, and to thank the legislator for listening to you.

Although it requires additional effort, it is an excellent idea to send the legislator a brief letter summarizing your telephone conversation. The legislator will then have a written reminder of your concern.

LEGISLATOR ADDRESSES

STATE SENATOR OR REPRESENTATIVE:

The Honorable ____ (Name) _____
The State House
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Senator ____ (Name) _____: or

Dear Representative ____ (Name) _____:

(Body of letter)

Sincerely yours,

GOVERNOR

The Governor
The State House
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Governor ____ (Name) _____:

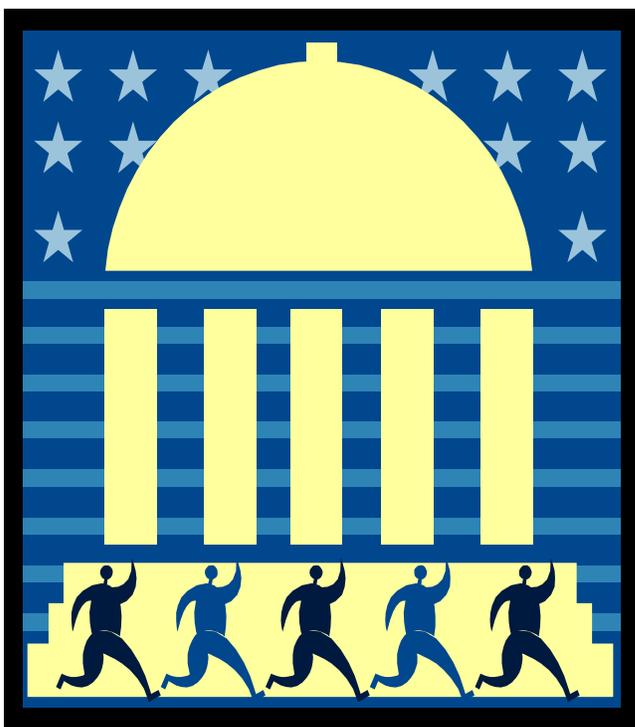
(Body of letter)

Sincerely yours,

PUBLIC HEARINGS

In addition to influencing the members of a committee individually, you can influence them as a group by testifying at the committee or subcommittee meetings. These meetings are referred to as public hearings because they involve hearing testimony by persons directly interested in the legislation.

Public hearings provide the opportunity to educate and influence legislators, spotlight issues, educate the public, arouse the public opinion, publicize positions and problem solutions, and test reactions to positions. They are important because when the legislators eventually vote on the bill they may tend to lean heavily on the testimony presented at the hearing.



If you determine that you would like to testify at a public hearing, schedule your appearance. Usually you can simply telephone the committee and express your wish to testify. Also, find out what the hearing rules are, and be prepared to follow them. The committee can provide you with this information.

Before you testify, make sure your own legislator knows you are doing so. If your legislator is not a member of the committee, educate the legislator in person about your concern. If your legislator is a member, introduce yourself ahead of time as a constituent from the district.

As soon as you arrive at the hearing, you must fill out a witness slip.

In presenting your testimony, address the committee, not others in the audience, and be familiar with the names of the committee members. Do not try to be more of an expert than you really are. Do not make arguments or assertions you are not prepared to prove and defend. Be ready to answer questions. A committee functions like a jury, and committee members want to better understand what you mean; they attain this understanding through questioning.

RECOGNIZING WHAT THE LEGISLATOR HAS TO GAIN

Just as you may have a lot to gain by meeting with a legislator (e.g., a vote for your side of the issue or a promise to try to recruit other legislators to your side of the issue) the legislator may have a lot to gain by meeting with you too. Most importantly, the legislator may be able to acquire information on the issue.

In the words of one lawmaker, “Legislators thirst for information.” In the words of another lawmaker, “Legislators are often very dependent upon legislative advocates since it is often the advocate and not the legislator who knows what is in the legislation.” The nature and volume of bills introduced into the legislature prohibit any legislator from reading, much less studying, all of them. In fact, most legislators have time to carefully read and study only a small percentage of the bills that are voted on, let alone introduced. As a result, legislators specialize in only a few legislative areas and depend on others for information in all additional areas. Those “others” are often legislative advocates.

By supplying accurate, timely, and usable information to the legislators, you will help yourself in gaining the legislators’ votes on your side of the issue. As stressed by many legislative experts, a lot of votes are cast on the basis of non-information, and you should not allow this to occur. Do not rely on just the relationship you have established with the legislator to get your way; rely on solid facts and analysis as well.

WORKING WITH THE LEGISLATOR’S STAFF

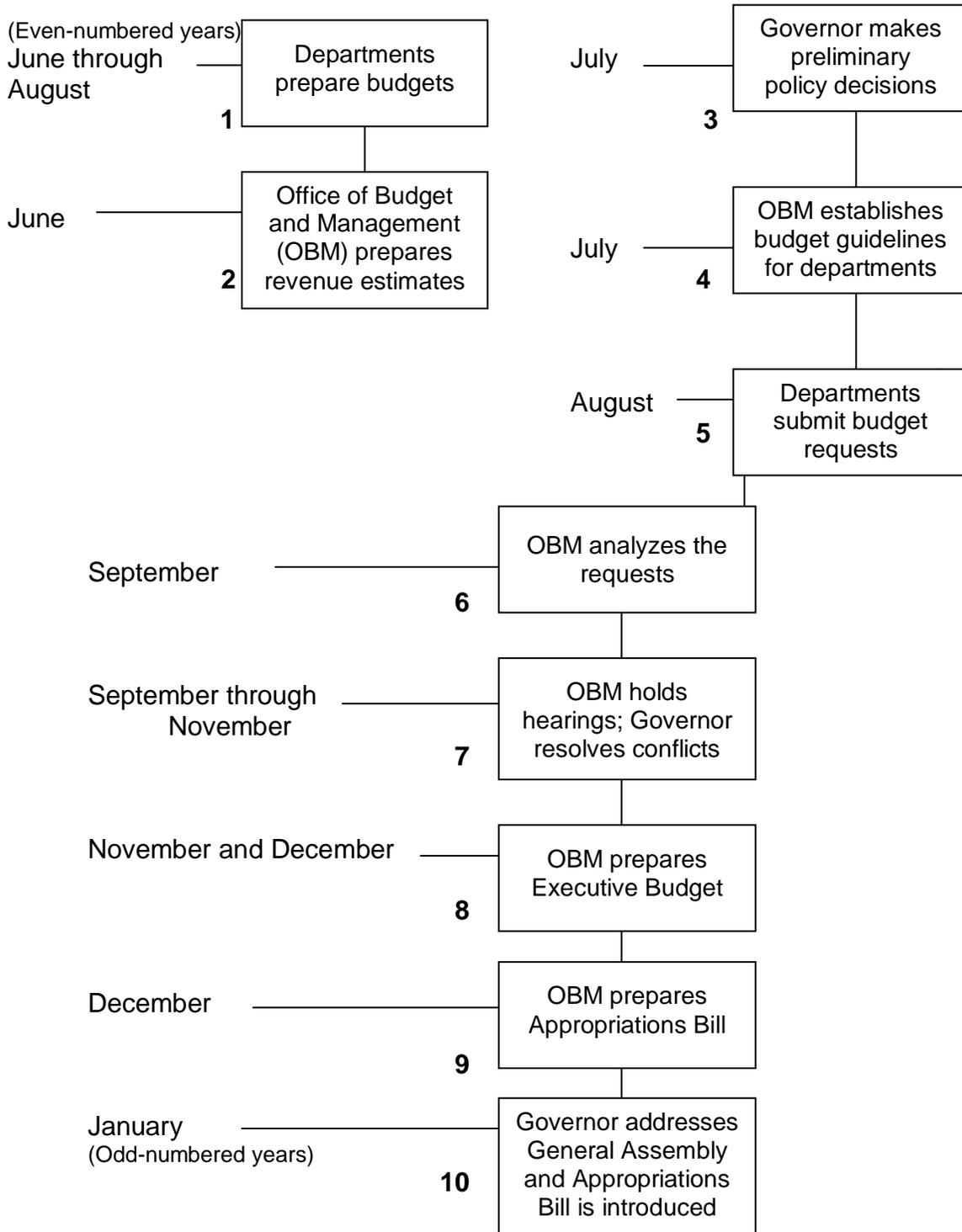
There is more to a legislative contact than just meeting with the legislator. There is also meeting with the legislator’s staff.

Legislators’ staffs greatly affect the policy-making process. Their responsibilities include generating and filtering information brought to the legislators’ attention, initiating policy decisions, planning and monitoring committee hearings and investigations, drafting legislation and committee reports, negotiating points of difference among parallel bills passed in both chambers, and serving as liaisons with other forces in the legislative process.

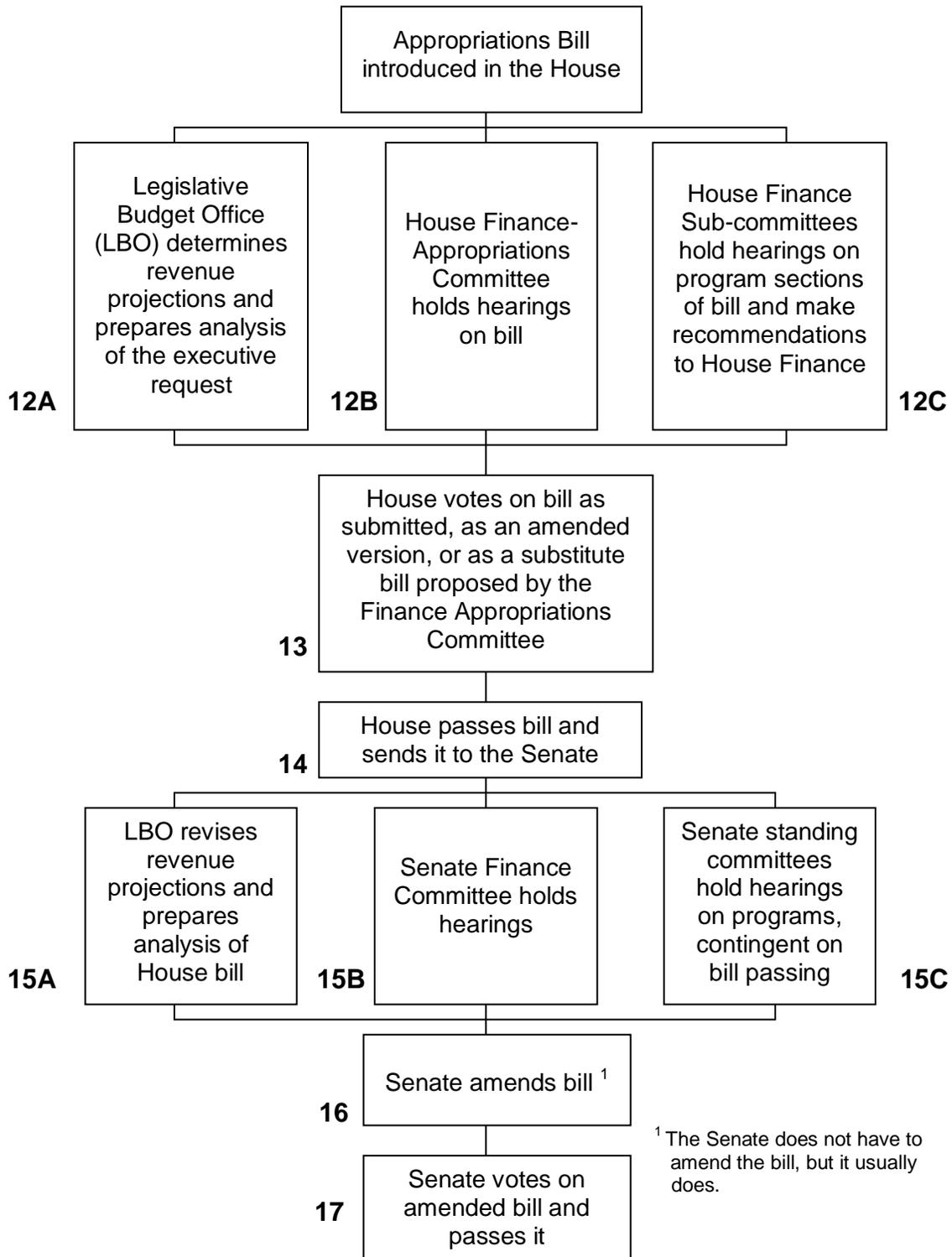
Members of legislator’s staff, who are usually more accessible than the legislators they work for, can assist you in several ways. They can:

- have the background and sophistication necessary to understand the technical ties and substance of issues of interest to you;
- be instrumental in planning contacts with legislators, arranging for you to present testimony, and in framing questions that will be asked at hearings to give you an opportunity to make a persuasive case;
- help see that information you provide receives consideration by the legislators.

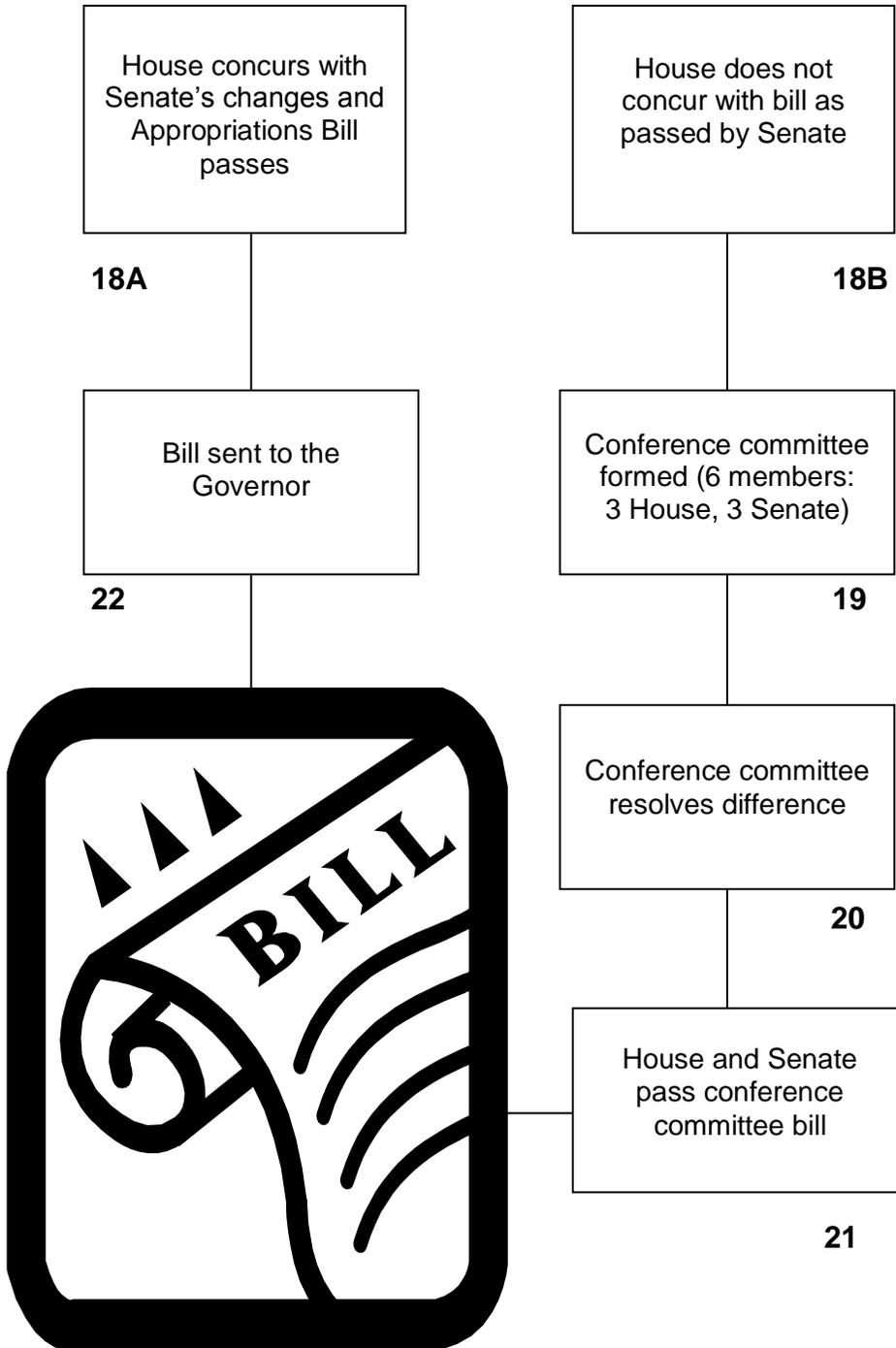
THE BUDGETARY PROCESS AND THE ADMINISTRATION APPROXIMATE TIME FRAME



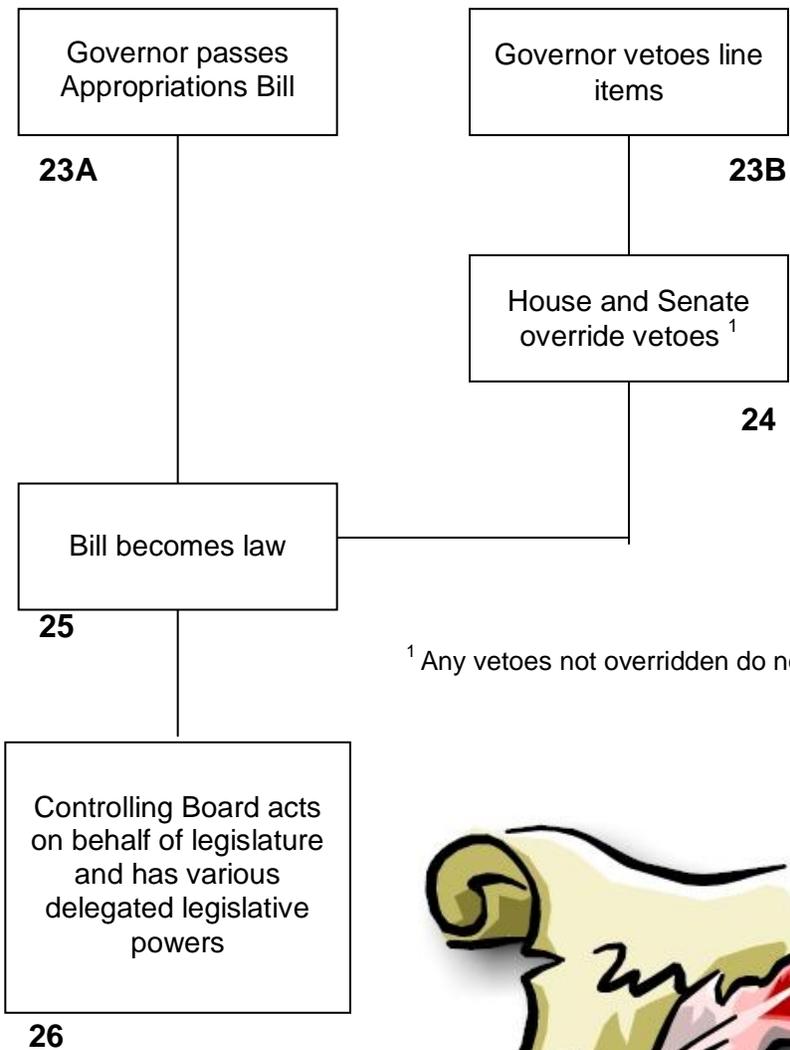
THE BUDGETARY PROCESS AND THE LEGISLATURE



HOUSE/SENATE CONCURRENCE



THE BUDGETARY PROCESS AND THE GOVERNOR



¹ Any vetoes not overridden do not become law



STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER

Concentrate Your Efforts in the Early Months of the Biennium

Key legislative appropriation decisions are made in the General Assembly between January and June of odd-numbered years (i.e., within the first six months of the first session of a biennium). After that time the budget is set for a two-year period, although occasionally a supplemental appropriations bill is approved if funds become available. In the second year of the biennium, it is difficult to have an impact since the budget for that year is pre-set with little leeway even for the unexpected. Therefore, it is advisable to concentrate your efforts in the early months of the biennium.

Begin Early to Influence Finance Committee Members

Although a standing committee of either the House or the Senate may consider the bill pertaining to your new program before the bill is reviewed by the Finance Committee, you can still begin to influence the Finance Committee members. Be sure to do this early in anticipation of receiving adequate financial support from the members. On occasion the Finance Committees have been known to pass an appropriations measure for a bill pending before a standing committee.

Meet with Administrators and Legislators Early

It is important to meet with administrators as a department's budget is being prepared. In addition, it can be highly productive to meet with legislators in November of even-numbered years, before the General Assembly convenes for the new biennium and the formal budget review and debate processes begin. Since legislators often have their own budget priorities that they will push when their chamber considers the Governor's proposed Appropriations Bill, meeting with the legislators can provide an opportunity to develop trade-offs and mutual assistance agreements. The legislators become interested in your special concerns, and you become potential supporters of issues that are important to them. As emphasized by one legislator addressing the case of legislators who have not yet formed priorities, "It is important to meet with them right after the November election because you must convince legislators to be committed to your interests before their positions become jelled."

Look to the Senate Finance Committee

If the House Finance – Appropriations Committee does not pass your appropriation, look to the Senate Finance Committee for possible passage. A member of the House Finance-Appropriations Committee advises that usually the House Committee does not try to spend all the anticipated funds. Instead, it makes provisions for the Senate Finance Committee to sponsor some projects. Thus, a citizens' group has a second chance.

Introduce Budget Amendments in the House Finance-Appropriations Committee

Your chances for acquiring appropriations are better if your program is incorporated into a department's budget. If, however, no department requests money for your program, its chances are not necessarily dead. Within the legislature, the House Finance-Appropriations Committee may be able to help you out.

When the House Finance-Appropriations Committee receives the Governor's budget it is free to amend or rewrite the budget as it sees fit. For example, one legislator was successful in amending the budget in Committee to fund an arthritis research program. This amendment, like any amendment to the budget made in the House Finance-Appropriations Committee, did not have to clear another subject-matter standing committee in the House. Of course, once the budget is out of the Committee, amendments made to it there can be defeated elsewhere.

Obtain Support from the Governor

If the Governor is opposed to calling for either new sources of funding or increases in existing sources to fund your proposal, you must somehow convince the Governor either to reallocate state dollars or to work on the basis that revenue growth will be adequate.

Show the Governor that a move on your behalf will be in the Governor's political interest, then get the public to support your position. The best indicator that the Governor's political interest is being served is a strong endorsement by the public.



RESOURCES

The following resources can provide you with information about the legislature:

- √ **The State Legislature** – Write to the Clerk of the House or the Clerk of the Senate, State House, Columbus, Ohio 43215, or telephone the House at 614-466-3357 and the Senate at 614-466-4900.
- √ **Legislative Information** – The toll-free number for this service is 1-800-282-0253 (or 466-8842 if you live in Franklin County). The staff provides information on any bill in the current General Assembly. The staff also index all bills in a variety of ways and keep a daily update on any action taken on the floor. The staff does not, however, interpret any legislative actions. The phone is covered from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

There is also a federal Office of Legislative Information, which gives an update on legislative action in Washington. Though not toll-free, you can reach this service at 202-225-1772.

- √ **Ohio United Way** – Contact at 88 East Broad Street, Suite 620, Columbus, Ohio 43215 or 614-224-8146.
- √ **The League of Women Voters** – Contact the League at 17 S. High St., Columbus, Ohio 43215, 614-469-1505. On the national level, contact the League at 1730 M. Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, 202-429-1965.
- √ **State Democratic Headquarters** – Contact the Ohio Democratic Party at 340 East Fulton St., Columbus, Ohio 43215, 614-221-6563 or 1-877-OHIO-DEM (toll-free)
- √ **State Republican Headquarters** – Contact the Ohio Republican Party at 211 S. Fifth St., Ste. 400, Columbus, Ohio 43215, 614-228-2481.

PUBLICATIONS

The following publications can provide you with information about the legislature:

- √ **A Guidebook for Ohio Legislators** – Published by the Ohio legislative Service Commission, the most recent edition of the book should be available for loan at your public library. To purchase the book, contact the Ohio Legislative Service Commission, State House, Columbus, Ohio 43215 or 614-466-3615.
- √ **Budget Footnotes** – Information on the fiscal position of the General Revenue Fund, the main source discretionary funding for state programs. In addition, feature articles highlight LSC research on a variety of fiscal and policy issues. This can be accessed through: www.lsc.state.oh.us/publications.html
- √ **Know Your Ohio Government** – The most recent edition of this League of Women Voters of Ohio book can be purchased from the League, 17 S. High St., Columbus, Ohio 43215, 614-469-1505.
- √ **Legislative Bulletin** – is printed each week that the legislature is in session and reports on bills related to human services, amendments and lists hearing schedules. The *Administrative Report* examines state and federal executive branch agencies, government regulations, and funding sources affecting Ohio's human services. *Budget Update* reports on Ohio's two-year budget. The *Legislative Roster* is the current listing of Ohio legislative and government offices. To subscribe to these publications, contact the Ohio United Way, 88 East Broad Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215, 614-224-8146.

ACTIVITIES FOR ADVOCATES

1. Plan a day to visit a legislator in your area. You have local council people, state representatives and senators, and representatives from Washington.
2. Plan a day to have a legislator to your school district or to your child's education program. Join the local and county facility to make the legislator aware of programs and possible needs.
3. Invite media to visit your school district. Have a tour pre-planned, with permission from parents for the media to film. Give the news media ideas for articles based on positive aspects of the program or specific needs which could possibly be remedied with the aid of media exposure.
4. Invite the local newspaper to talk to you about the district's goals for educating children with disabilities. Focus on the positive while addressing needs that could make programs better.
5. Ask the local radio station to invite you to be interviewed. Stress your goals for such an interview. Prepare the host by discussing these goals.
6. If your school district has a local TV spot, utilize this medium to share information with the public. Present information through an editorial format, or have a video tape of your programs while you or someone narrates.
7. Have a local car wash, raffle, or similar fund raiser for your school district's programs. Advertise what the proceeds will be used for; involve special education teachers, students, and parents.
8. Begin a parent or parent-teacher organization in your district for special education. This organization can help in letter writing, in sharing information through the media to the public, and in fund raisers. It will also give you a very obvious support base.
9. Get to know your state board of education members. Remember, they approve rules and regulations, along with funding for programs before the legislature. Contact board members to keep them aware of special education.
10. Learn more about your legislators, both in Ohio and Washington. The more you know about their interests, hobbies, and lifestyles, the better your plan to share your interests with them.

11. Recognize your legislator. Be non-partisan, let them know you can show appreciation through positive recognition with their constituency. Invite them to a banquet; ask them to speak to your parent organization or have an awards ceremony. You need the legislator's support, but he/she also can use your resources.

12. Get to know legislative aides. They can make the real difference in whether the legislator is informed of your interests. They wade through the bills and paperwork. You can help them do this with special education interests in mind.

13. Attend public hearings. The atmosphere alone is an experience. Before giving testimony, find out how it is done. Watch and listen.

14. Testify at public hearings. There are public hearings on state standards. You can have an impact on many issues related to education of children with disabilities. You are casting a very important vote when you voice your views at a public hearing.

15. Have a communication network with teaching staff and key parents. Make sure your organization has a calling tree and easy access to e-mail addresses for times when immediate communication is necessary. "Budget alerts" and legislative updates may require "overnight" response. Fast communication is a necessity. E-mail is a wonderful tool for this.



The Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities (OCECD) is a statewide, nonprofit organization that serves families of infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities in Ohio, and agencies who provide services to them. OCECD works through the coalition efforts of more than 35 parent and professional disability organizations which comprise the Coalition.

Established in 1972 and staffed primarily by parents of children and adults with disabilities, persons with disabilities, and education professionals, the Coalition mission is to ensure that every Ohio child with special needs receives a free, appropriate, public education in the least restrictive environment to enable that child to reach his/her highest potential. Throughout Ohio, the Coalition's services reach families of children and youth, birth through twenty-one, with all disabilities.

OCECD's programs help parents become informed and effective representatives for their children in all educational settings. In addition, youth are assisted to advocate for themselves. Through knowledge about laws, resources, rights and responsibilities, families are better able to work with agencies to ensure that appropriate services are received for the benefit of their sons and daughters.



**OHIO COALITION FOR THE EDUCATION OF
CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

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MARION, OHIO 43302-3741
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(740) 383-6421 (Fax) • www.ocecd.org**

Download the free mobile barcode reader on your smartphone at www.i-nigma.com and scan this barcode to visit our website instantly and get more information about OCECD.

