

Helpful Tips

- When speaking with legislators or other elected officials, be brief and to the point.
- When writing letters or speaking at public hearings, avoid using industry jargon - it confuses people.
- If you cannot attend a public hearing or meeting, ask if you can submit written comments. Letters should be kept to one page if possible, and contain your contact information.
- Do not be afraid to admit that you do not know the answer to a question; get contact information and follow up with the answer.
- Never make accusations or derogatory comments about others, even when they disagree with you.
- Before taking any action, research your issues thoroughly - both the pros and cons.
- Communicate frequently with other groups. Make sure they are aware of your issue and ask them for help.
- Think big! Use every tool and invite stakeholders outside of the industry.
- Pay close attention to dates, hearings and meeting times. You will not automatically be notified of events so pay close attention to the process; make calls to elected officials and check websites frequently for updates.
- If you do not succeed the first time, get back in the saddle and try again. Most legislation and regulations are not passed on the first try. Reassess and make corrections as needed.

Additional Resources

Useful websites for additional information also include the following:

- League of Women Voters www.lwv.org
- U.S. House of Representatives www.house.gov
- U.S. Senate www.senate.gov
- Thomas. This a Library of Congress site for searching such things as federal voting records and for tracking federal legislation. www.thomas.loc.gov
- Project Vote Smart also compiles independent information on candidates running for office www.vote-smart.org
- The Connecticut General Assembly provides links to the CT legislators' home pages, as well as voting history and current bill status. www.cga.ct.gov
- For local elections & referendums, visit your town website, and town library.

“I’M AN EQUESTRIAN AND I VOTE”

***Membership dues made this brochure possible. Please consider joining CHC so that we may continue to serve the industry.*

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Legislation & Grassroots Action

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Legislative Process

Enacting legislation can be a complex process, and is often very confusing for the public. Every state has its own procedures, and even the federal government has variations between the House and Senate chambers.

In brief, if a law is passed on the federal level, then it applies to the entire United States and all its jurisdictions. If a law is enacted by a state, this means that the law only applies to that state.

Each state varies slightly in their progression to passage, but the same basic concepts apply to all. First, a Representative or a Senator will introduce the Bill at or near the start of the legislative session. Then it must be passed through both chambers (House & Senate) by a majority vote. Finally, the Governor must sign it. The same process applies to federal legislation except that the President signs Bills.

But, prior to being voted upon, the Bill must be assigned to and voted upon by a Committee. This starts immediately after a Bill is assigned a number and “introduced” to the floor (the sponsoring legislator explains the Bill and its purpose to her or his chamber). The Bill is then assigned to one or more “Committees.” A Committee is a panel of legislators given oversight of a certain topic. For example, in Connecticut, Bills relating to animals or agriculture will be sent to the “Environment Committee.”

The Bill typically is voted on by the Committee before it can be sent to the House or Senate for those votes. On occasion, a Bill will be sent to more than one Committee, especially if it has multiple issues to be addressed, such as funding, procedural changes, or criminal penalties.

Most importantly, when a Bill is before a Committee, a public hearing is held so people may testify in support or opposition. This is your opportunity to make your voice heard! If you cannot attend the public hearing, ask if written testimony will be accepted. Regardless of whether or not you submit testimony at the public hearing, you can still contact your elected officials to share your viewpoints with them. They may not sit on the Bill’s Committee; however they can still influence the Bill’s progress.

Also, a Bill may be “amended” at any time during the process. Amendments make changes to a Bill. These range from minor technical revisions, to complete changes in the language and intent of the Bill. It is not unusual to see more than one amendment attached to a bill, especially if it is very controversial.

Once a bill has been passed by both the House and Senate, it can either be signed into effect by the Governor (or President), or vetoed, which means the Governor/President rejects the bill and it must start again. The Governor/President may also take no action on the Bill, in which case it passes by default. If the Governor vetoes a Bill, it may still be passed if it is returned to the House and Senate, and is favorably voted on again by each chamber with support of at least two-thirds of its total membership.

Letters to Legislators or Committees:

Letters to legislators must convey significant information in a very limited format. Legislators receive large volumes of mail on a daily basis, and it is a legislative aid who most often reviews these letters before they are passed on to the legislator. Therefore, it is imperative that your letter be brief and has the intent conveyed clearly from the start. Remember to include the Bill number and title, as well as your name and contact information. Always be respectful and polite, and provide

factual information without making derogatory remarks. Letters submitted as testimony to public hearings should follow the same format.

It is important to note that if you plan to testify at a public hearing on behalf of any organization, that you first confirm with that group that you have authority to act as their representative.

Be aware that when speaking at a hearing, your time may be limited, often to just two or three minutes per person. If you do not feel that you can present all the necessary information in a limited time frame, consider splitting information between yourself and another person. This allows you to both present different, but useful information.

Locating your Elected Official:

If you are unsure who your elected officials are, there are several ways to locate them. Usually, towns are broken down into district numbers. Therefore, each legislator has a district that can be made up of multiple towns. To determine your district and the name of your legislator, you can call your town hall. You may also go to your respective state website (if available) or call your Secretary of State’s office. The Secretary of State can be found in the blue pages of your phone book or by calling directory assistance.

Notes:

Be careful not to confuse “legislation” with “regulation”, as they follow different procedures. Legislation is relative to the enacting of laws, whereas a regulation is a rule or policy written by an agency or board that has oversight of an issue.

Please be aware that this brochure is meant as a brief outline only. The legislative process is much more complex than can be explained in detail here. Contact organizations such as your local Horse Council or Farm Bureau for more specific advice on active legislation.