HOW TO

ADVOCATE FOR
STATEWIDE
POLICY CHANGE
OVERVIEW

1) Know the process
2) Prioritize issues that you care about
3) Examine the landscape
4) Reach out to diverse communities
5) Understand pressure points
6) Meet with legislators
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8) Raise public awareness
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OBJECTIVE

Oregon state legislators create many of the education policies that impact students on a daily basis. Legislators make decisions on policies based on the information received from colleagues, advocates, constituents, and their personal experiences. We believe that it is imperative for students to participate in the legislative process in order to ensure their experiences are included in the policies enacted.

To assist you in understanding and influencing the process, Oregon Student Voice offers the following guide.
1 KNOW THE PROCESS

The state legislative process can feel overwhelming, but once you understand each step, it is easier to navigate. Here is a quick and simple breakdown of how an idea becomes a law:

- A person or group of people suggest an idea for legislation;
- A legislator sponsors a bill for that idea and sends it to be drafted by legislative counsel (lawyers);
- After many revisions, the bill is introduced in the first legislative chamber (either the House or Senate) and assigned to a policy or budget committee (most bills are not assigned to committee);
- This committee holds a public hearing and votes to pass or not pass the bill;
- If passed, the bill goes to the full chamber to be voted on;
- If passed, the bill goes to the second chamber (either the House or Senate) and follows the same process; and
- If it passes both chambers, the bill is sent to the Governor to be signed into law.

To learn more about the process, visit: https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/citizen_engagement.
PRIORITIZE ISSUES THAT YOU CARE ABOUT

Each legislative session you will need to determine the issues you would like addressed. You will need to prioritize issues as there will be limited time to address multiple issues at once. As a general rule of thumb, your issues should not be localized to your geographic community, but should have statewide implications. Be sure to extensively research each of your issues, have clear answers to any questions, and know your opposition. Before session, determine how you will engage legislators to support your issues.

EXAMINE THE LANDSCAPE

About 3,000 bills are considered each odd-year session (long session) and several hundred bills are considered each even-year session (short session). You will need to examine how your issues will be received by legislators. You will want to review past bills related to your issues, particularly public hearings, to understand potential opportunities or challenges you may encounter. You will also need to analyze the political climate surrounding your issues as legislators may not want to address polarizing issues. To view current and past bills, visit: https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/bills_laws.
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REACH OUT TO MULTIPLE COMMUNITIES

Meet with community-based advocacy organizations and other like-minded groups to discuss their priority issues and identify meaningful areas for partnership. Working together to advocate for priority issues helps ensure that legislators address issues. Coalitions also enable you to incorporate everyone’s thoughts and experiences into how issues are addressed, which may lead to better policy outcomes.

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UNDERSTAND PRESSURE POINTS

In each step of the legislative process, there is an opportunity to influence legislators. Legislators rely on information from individuals like yourself to make decisions. Legislators in both Chambers also depend on the work done in committees. Therefore, it is imperative that you build relationships with legislators serving on the committee to which your bill is assigned, particularly the committee’s chair, as most bills do not pass out of committee. To learn who serves on each committee, visit: https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/committees.
MEET WITH LEGISLATORS

Speak with legislators from all parties about your bill. Meetings typically last 15-minutes. During the meeting, cover these topics: (1) your bill, (2) why it’s important, and (3) what action is important for legislator to take, such as voting yes on a bill. Prior to the meeting, prepare by researching the legislator’s background to understand their potential stances. Legislators particularly want to meet with their constituents, so be sure to identify yourself as such if you live in their district. Find your legislator here: https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/FindYourLegislator/leg-districts.html.

For more information on how to communicate with decision makers, check out our guide at: https://www.oregonstudentvoice.org/empower.

TESTIFY BEFORE COMMITTEES

Advocate for your bill during committee hearings through written and verbal testimony. Submit written testimony by writing a letter addressed to the committee’s chair expressing support or opposition to the bill. This letter should be submitted to the committee’s legislative aide and will become public record. Provide verbal testimony by arriving early to public hearings and signing up to speak about the bill. There will be limited time, so comments will need to be brief. Find examples of written testimony here: https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2018R1/Measures/Exhibits/HB4053.
RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS

Issues with a large public following can sometimes receive more attention from legislators. Be sure to utilize multiple outlets to let the public know about the issue and why you are advocating for change. These outlets can include: (1) social media campaigns, (2) newspaper opinion pieces, and (3) local rallies. It may also be helpful to hold a lobby day where you bring in numerous individuals to advocate for an issue at the legislature on the same day.

STAY ALERT

Session moves quickly so it is important to keep checking on the progress of your bills to ensure that they are being considered and passed. Continuously meet with legislators to keep them updated on your bill’s progress and ask for assistance if it is stalled in committee. Legislators juggle multiple commitments and staying in contact with them throughout the process can help ensure your goals are met.
It is vital that we, as students, engage with policy makers. As the next generation of leaders, we must revive the conversations between elected officials and youth to ensure that our thoughts are heard. We, as constituents of every congressional district, are impacted by legislation and it is time that we share our voice.

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