

# Understanding the Legislative Process | CPD

Sue Reeves

11/22/2013



A view of the Utah State Capitol

*This is the second in a six-part series on advocacy: when to do it, where to do it and how to do it effectively. Our thanks to the Legislative Coalition for People with Disabilities and the Utah Statewide Independent Living Council for providing source information.*

To understand how to influence potential legislation, you must first discover how the legislative process works. The State Legislature is responsible for making and changing state laws, as well as setting funding levels for the executive branch of government (the state budget).

There are two processes that take place: Appropriations and Bills.

The appropriations process decides the state budget and sets the funding levels for state programs, for example: funding for education, health care, Medicaid, housing, deaf and blind services, employment, etc. This is where your advocacy will take place if you have budget concerns.

The bill process creates or changes state statute and creates new programs, for example: creating an assistive technology program, lemon laws, changing the statute of how funding is distributed to school districts, etc.

Advocacy begins when you recognize the need to improve a program, create a new program or change state statute. Begin by talking to advocacy groups and getting involved. Next you want to talk to agency directors. Finally you take your issue to the legislators.

If your issue goes through the appropriations process, you want to find out which legislative appropriations committee would be discussing your issue. Contact the members

of that committee. The appropriations committees in Utah that consistently work with disability issues are Social Services (Early intervention, Children With Special Health Care Needs, Medicaid, mental health, services for people with disabilities, workforce services, vocational rehabilitation, independent living, services for the blind and visually impaired, services for the deaf and hard of hearing), Higher Education and Public Education (special education, schools for the deaf and blind).

If you want to create or change state statute, you must find a legislator who can support your idea or "carry the bill." This idea then becomes a bill which needs to pass through the legislative process to become a law. A bill will be heard and voted on seven times before it becomes a law.

Bills passed by the Legislature will change, delete or add to the laws of the state. The state budget is passed as a bill too, but the process is different. During the General Session, appropriations subcommittees put together the pieces of the overall budget, setting the levels and kinds of programs that are available through the various state agencies.

Utah residents can follow the progress of bills during the legislative session by visiting <http://le.utah.gov> and using the Tracking Service.

*On Monday: How an idea becomes a law.*