Lawmaking in Nebraska: An Advocate’s Overview of How it Works

Brad Meurrens
Public Policy Director
Disability Rights Nebraska

Disability Rights Nebraska
Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities
There are 49 senators in the Nebraska Legislature. Each senator represents one district that has about 35,000 people living in it. You live in one of these 49 districts.

Senators are elected by citizens and serve four-year terms. About half of the Legislature is up for election or re-election every two years. To be a state senator, you must be at least 21 years old, have lived in your district for one year and be a registered voter.

The Nebraska Legislature is a citizen legislature, which means most of its members have other jobs in addition to serving as a state senator. Senators receive $12,000 a year for serving in the Legislature.
The Legislature: An Overview

- The lawmaking process in Nebraska officially begins when a senator introduces a bill into the Legislature, which meets each January. But the process actually begins much earlier, when a senator first begins to formulate ideas for new laws.

- An idea for a new law may be suggested by anyone: concerned citizens, special interest groups, state agencies or the governor.
Before the Legislature can formally consider the idea, it must be introduced as a bill by a senator or legislative committee.

Committees debate and propose amendments to bills, and the full Legislature has an opportunity to debate each bill at least two times before its final passage.

Senators may propose amendments to alter a bill at each stage of debate.
FROM A BILL TO A LAW
Legislative Process

Bill Introduction → Committee Hearing → General File → Select File → Final Reading → Governor → Laws of Nebraska
Bill Introduction

- Roughly 500 – 800 bills are introduced each session.

- The idea must be introduced by a senator to be formally considered by the Legislature.

- Committees then debate and propose amendments to introduced bills, and the full Legislature has an opportunity to debate each bill at least two times (General File and Select File).

RESOURCES

www.nebraskalegislature.gov
Bill Room: Rm. 1104
Unicameral Update
Legislative Hotline: 800-742-7456

Disability Rights Nebraska
Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities
Committees

- With the exception of a few technical bills, all legislative bills must receive a public hearing by a legislative committee where citizens have a chance to express their opinions to committee members.

- After the hearing, committees may vote to send the bill to General File with or without amendments, indefinitely postpone the bill or take no action on it.
Legislative Committees

The Nebraska Legislature has 14 standing committees:

1. Agriculture
2. Appropriations
3. Banking, Commerce, Insurance
4. Business & Labor
5. Education
6. General Affairs
7. Government, Military & Veterans Affairs
8. Health & Human Services
9. Judiciary
10. Natural Resources
11. Nebraska Retirement Systems
12. Revenue
13. Transportation & Telecommunications
14. Urban Affairs
Committee Hearing

- After a bill is introduced, it is sent to a committee.

- After the public hearing, the committee members consider what action they want to take on the bill.

- They can advance the bill as it is, indefinitely postpone the bill (kill it), take no action on the bill, or advance the bill to the next stage with suggested changes (amendments).
General File

- If the committee advances a bill, it goes to the General File stage.

- General file is the first time the full Legislature has the opportunity to debate and vote on a bill.

- Senators also can propose amendments in General File.

- It takes a majority vote of the Legislature (25 votes) to adopt amendments and to move a bill from General File to the next stage of consideration.

Disability Rights Nebraska
Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities
SELECT FILE

- Select File is the second time the full Legislature debates and votes on a bill.
- This step allows senators another opportunity to amend, compromise and reflect on the proposed law.
- On Select File, a bill may be indefinitely postponed or advanced to the next stage.

FINAL READING

- Final Reading is the third and last time a bill is considered by the entire Legislature.
- A bill may not be amended or debated during the Final Reading stage.
- Usually, it only takes a majority vote (25 senators) for a bill to be passed on Final Reading.
- A bill with an emergency clause requires a vote of 2/3 (33 senators) of the Legislature.
Last Step: The Governor

- After the Legislature passes a bill in the final reading stage, it goes to the governor for his or her approval.

- The governor has five days, excluding Sundays, to decide what to do with a bill.

- If the governor signs a bill or declines to act on it, the bill becomes a state law.

- The governor may veto a bill, and can line-item veto, or strike specific budget items.

- The Legislature may override a governor’s veto, although it takes a vote of 30 senators to do so.
ADVOCACY:
RESOURCES & TIPS
“Citizens” Unicameral Page

This page is designed to help citizens find features and resources on the Legislature’s website that may be particularly helpful to citizens:

The Office of the Clerk of the Legislature is the administrative arm of the Legislature.

The office maintains official records of all legislative business.

These records include: the Legislative Journal, bill indexes, committee hearing schedules, rosters, bill status information and legislative histories.
24-Hour Request Line & Legislative Hotline

24-HOUR REQUEST LINE
(402) 471-2877

The request line may be used to request free subscriptions to the Unicameral Update, or to request free limited copies of bills, resolutions or amendment. Callers are asked to provide the bill numbers and year of the legislation they wish to receive.

Disability Rights Nebraska
Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities

LEGISLATIVE HOTLINE

Lincoln area, Voice & Telephone Text (V/TT): (402) 471-2709

Other NE areas, Voice & Telephone Text (V/TT): (800) 742-7456

The hot line operates during the legislative session from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Hot line staff answer questions about the status of bills and respond to information requests from callers. The service also is available to any person who has a hearing loss or speech impairment.
A list of Senators Web Pages and a printable list of Senators by District and by Name is here:

http://nebraskalegislature.gov/senators/senator_list.php
Unicameral Update:
“The Nebraska Legislature’s Official News Source Since 1977”

- The Unicameral Update is a news source produced by the Nebraska Legislature's Unicameral Information Office.

- The office also works with the Legislative Technology Center on the web site design and content, and produces various educational and informational videos, brochures, and publications about the Nebraska Legislature.

- The Unicameral Update recaps what happened in the legislature that week.

- If you would like to receive a free subscription to the print version of the Unicameral Update call (402) 471-2788.

- To view the Unicameral Update online, visit: [http://update.legislature.ne.gov/](http://update.legislature.ne.gov/)
LB17 - State a right of juveniles who have a parent with a disability

Document Info
Introduced By: Bruese
Date of Introduction: January 10, 2019

Text Copies
Introduced

Additional Info
Statement of Intent
Fiscal Note

History

Date Action
Jan 23, 2019 Notice of hearing for January 31, 2019
Jan 14, 2019 McDonnell name added
Jan 14, 2019 Referred to Judiciary Committee
Jan 10, 2019 Date of introduction

Journal Vote
317
164
130
80

Amendments

Proposed by Priority

Considered

Related Transcripts

Floor Debate January 14, 2019
Senators' Web Pages

Each senator offers a page where the public can find his or her contact information, committee assignments and news releases. Senators' pages also contain his or her biography, district map, photos and information about bills the senator introduced. Click on a senator's name below to access his or her page or find your senator.

Speaker of the Legislature
Photos
Print Friendly List Of Current Senators - Sorted By Both Last Name And District

Find Your Senator
Enter Street Address, City State Zip

Links to Senators' Web Pages
Sort by Last Name or District

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaker of the Legislature</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albrecht, Joni</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arch, John</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blood, Carol</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolz, Kate</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bostelman, Bruce</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandt, Tom</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brower, Tom</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bries, Tom</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Disability Rights Nebraska
Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities
Bill Tracker:

This service provides a convenient way to track legislative activity in an organized way.

The eBill Book (a limited and free service) allows you to track up to 15 bills simultaneously and (if you choose) receive daily e-mail notifications of activity on your bills of interest.

http://www.nebraska.gov/billtracker/
TESTIFYING TIPS
Testifying at a Committee Hearing

- Hearings usually begin at 1:30 p.m.
- After the sponsoring senator finishes his or her introduction, the committee chair will typically ask proponents of the bill to come forward individually and state their reasons for supporting the measure.
- Then the chair will ask opponents of the bill to come forward and state their opinions.

Disability Rights Nebraska
Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities
Testifying at a Committee Hearing

- Be prepared to answer questions asked by committee members.

- It is a good idea to prepare written copies of your testimony to distribute to the committee. This helps you get your message across more effectively by making it easy for senators to refer back to what you’ve said, and also helps to ensure an accurate hearing transcript.
Testifying Tips

- Be prepared to answer questions asked by committee members.
- Bring enough copies to distribute to all committee members, the two committee staff members, media and the transcribers' office. Fifteen copies is usually enough.
- Addressing committee members or testifiers from the audience is prohibited, and applause and other public demonstrations are not permitted at hearings.
- If auxiliary aids or reasonable accommodations are needed for you to attend a hearing, please call the Office of the Clerk of the Legislature, (402) 471-2271.
- If you have a hearing or speech impairment, please call the Ombudsman's Office at (402) 471-2035 or 800-742-7690. Advance notice of seven days is needed when requesting an interpreter.

Disability Rights Nebraska
Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities
Contact Information
Disability Rights Nebraska
Brad Meurrens
134 S. 13th St., 6th Floor
Lincoln, NE 68508
Phone: 402-474-3183
1-800-422-6691

Email: brad@drne.org
info@disabililtyrightsnebraska.org
Web: disabilityrightsnebraska.org

Disability Rights Nebraska
Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities