

Policy Toolkit

A guide to climate policy



The
Climate
Initiative

Getting Started

Introduction

Hello!

My name is Javan Santos and I am the Policy Manager for The Climate Initiative. Through these policy toolkits, I hope to show youth that policy can be simple and accessible for young people who are passionate about making change in their community. I started writing policy when I was in high school and have worked in policy for almost seven years now. The experience and knowledge from those years are poured into these toolkits for youth to use to make a difference in climate advocacy. Whether you are hoping to analyze policy, talk to a policymaker, or learn about what it takes to turn an idea into a law, I hope that you will learn something helpful in the resources these toolkits provide.

After you learn the fundamentals of navigating policy, this toolkit also comes with a run down of several different state-specific policy tools. In it, you'll find a history of climate policy in your state, legislators that are supportive of climate policy according to organizations within your state, and other useful information. Climate advocacy is not easy, and there is so much at stake for youth if nothing is done. My hope is that these toolkits will provide you all you need to make much needed change in your state and your community!

If you have any questions or thoughts on how we at The Climate Initiative can help your advocacy, please feel free to reach out to me at:
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Javan

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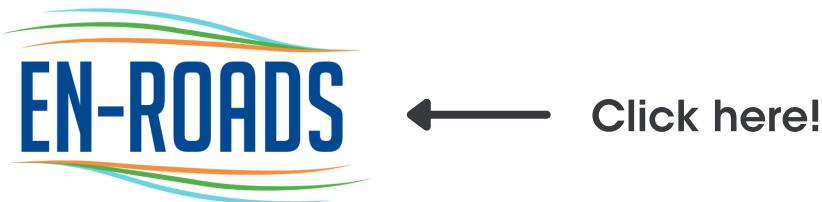
Table Of Contents

Climate Policy.....	1- 2
The Legislative Process.....	3 - 8
Communicating With Legislators.....	9 - 12
Guide To Participating In Public Hearing.....	13 - 15
Climate Change Advocacy at All Levels of Government.....	16 - 19

Climate Policy

Climate change is an issue that can be seen in almost every aspect of daily life. Not only is it an environmental issue, it is an issue that affects housing, public health, and even the economy. Learning about a few examples of climate change policies can help you understand the types of policies that can help mitigate climate change.

One great way to see how policy changes affect climate change is Climate Interactive's En-Roads Model. This resource can provide an interesting perspective on just what type of change needs to be done to prevent permanent damage due to climate change. Developed by The Climate Initiative's Advisory Council member John Sterman, feel free to interact with the tool below and see just how much impact certain policies have on climate change.



Examples of Climate Policy

Carbon Tax

- A policy stating that any person, family, or corporation who contributes to carbon emissions must pay a tax per ton of carbon they emit. Usually \$5-25 per ton based on previous policies.
- Helps mitigate climate change by incentivizing electrification and decarbonizing industries to avoid the carbon tax while raising government revenues to help address climate change.
- Mostly affects energy intensive industries and lower income households who cannot afford to electrify their vehicles and appliances (however, tax revenues could be returned to low income communities through rebates).

Gas Station Ban

- A ban that prevents the development of new gas stations, as well as the maintenance or expansion of currently open gas stations.
- Possible exception for the transition to charging stations, as well as for the installation of hydrogen fueling stations.
- Has only been successfully passed in one jurisdiction so far (Petaluma, CA), but is an up and coming policy push.
- Helps mitigate climate change by taking away the infrastructure that perpetuates carbon emissions and while promoting greener alternatives.

Carbon Neutral Retirement Investments

- Helps mitigate climate change by not allowing retirement investments in businesses that create carbon emissions.
- Maine recently passed a law that would require residents retirement funds to only invest in carbon neutral businesses and industries.
- Some people may worry that this policy limits their retirement growth because they have fewer investment options, but carbon neutral investment options help carbon neutral businesses grow and allow our economy to wean off investing in carbon emitting industries.



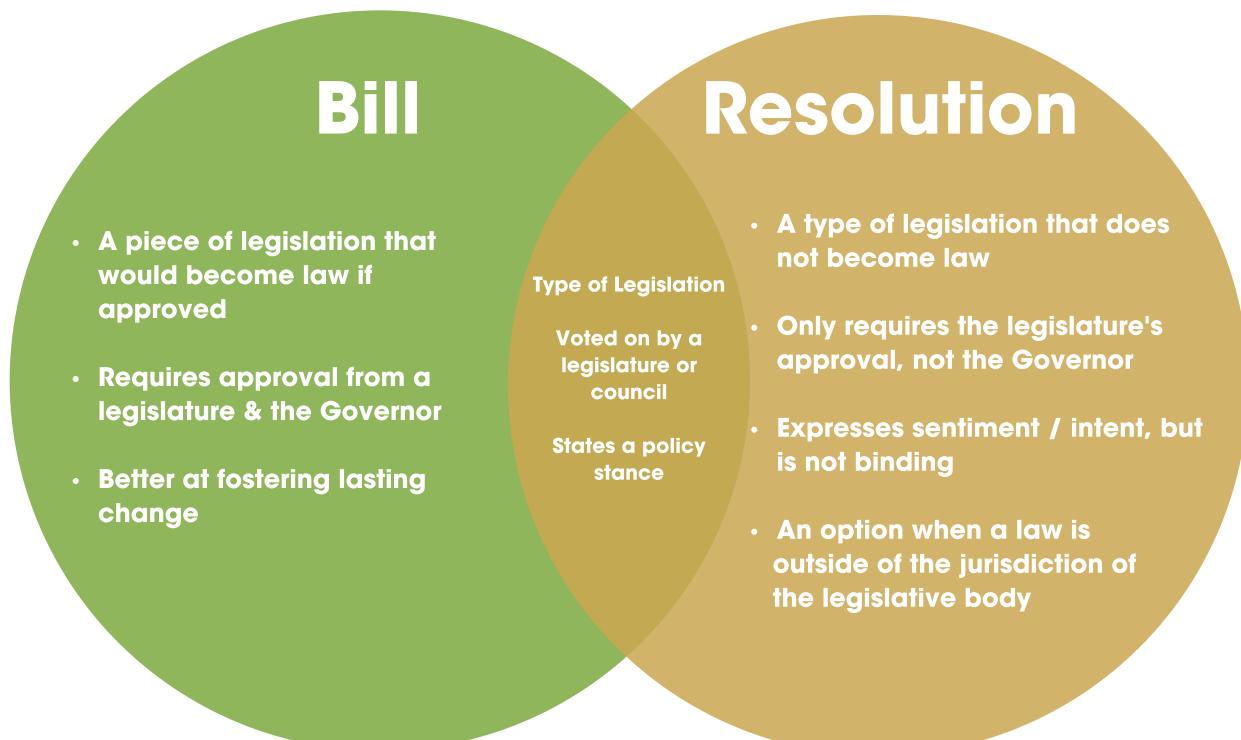
The Legislative Process

Understanding the legislative process will ensure that you are an informed climate advocate. Legislation is one of the most direct ways that changes are made to our government, which is why many climate advocates look to Congress, state legislatures, and local councils to enact much needed climate change legislation. This section will help you understand the different pieces of the legislative process to inform your climate advocacy.

Bills vs. Resolutions

There are 2 main types of legislation...

- A bill, sometimes called an ordinance on the city/municipal level, is a piece of legislation that seeks to change current law or create new laws. By changing or adding laws, legislators set the policies that must be executed by the government. Since legislatures are known for making laws, bills are what tends to be expected from legislators.
- A resolution is a form of legislation not codified into law, which could mean that the legislation is less binding. Examples of resolutions are changes to a legislature's rules or formal expressions of a stance of the body.



Bills tend to be better at fostering lasting change because they directly change laws. Your ask might be more binding if you are asking for a bill, but resolutions also have benefits in certain contexts. For example, a resolution could be a formal declaration that the legislature opposes a new coal power plant that got approved in their state. This resolution, though not binding, adds pressure and can be effective in making change, despite not creating new law.

Now that you know the two main types of legislation, we can move on to the process of creating it! Below are all the steps an idea takes to become a law.

Step 1: Idea

Legislation comes from an idea, a concept that will be put into law. The idea often comes from a need in the community. Once the idea is formed, the rest of the process turns the idea into action.



Step 2: Research

Before they create legislation, legislators must understand the issue they are hoping to address. Elected officials usually have a policy/legislative team who is responsible for researching problems faced in their community and proposing legislative solutions.

There are many things this team should research before drafting legislation, including:

- a. Local laws related to this issue
- b. Who would benefit from resolving this issue
- c. Laws that seek to solve this issue in other cities, states, or countries

Step 2: Research cont.

- d. Data from government agencies on how they hope to address the issue, and whether they think legislation is necessary (though legislation is a way to ensure change happens, sometimes government agencies can make policy changes without legislation. Communicating with government agencies clarifies whether legislation is the right path to take).
- e. Possible consequences of not addressing the issue
- f. Any information that supports the need for legislation



Step 3: Drafting

After researching, the next step is putting pen to paper and writing up the legislation! This process includes deciding whether a bill or resolution would be the most appropriate. If it is a bill, this also decides whether changing current law or creating an entirely new law is more appropriate as well. These decisions can be technical, but they matter to legislators and could make a difference to whether or not the legislation is passed.

Step 4: Introduction

This is the stage where the legislation is submitted to the legislature and begins its process. During this stage, a number is assigned, and if necessary, the legislation is referred to a committee, which will be tasked with holding a hearing.



Step 5: Hearing

During the hearing process, the legislation is discussed by the legislators and the community. Here, community members submit oral or written testimony in support of or in opposition to a piece of legislation. All testimony and discussion is then transcribed into a report that will be accessible by the community and the legislators to inform them on how the community feels about the legislation.



Step 6: Mark Up

When legislation is “marked up” it means that this legislation is amended from its original version based on feedback from the legislators and/or the community. Provisions could be added or taken out, depending on the will of the body. However, not all bills get marked up or amended; sometimes bills will pass into law in the form in which they are introduced. This stage is also when legislators vote to place it on the session agenda. This is often the stage at which a bill dies in committee.

Step 7: Session

Once the legislation is placed on the session agenda, the next step is for the body to debate. During this , the legislature will discuss the bill and their stances on the bill on the session floor, offer any additional amendments, and vote on the legislation.



Step 8: Passage by the Legislative Body

The last step on the legislator's side is passage. Both houses of the legislature will have to pass a version of the bill, and agree on one final bill before the bill is sent to the executive branch to sign into law. For a resolution, no action by the executive branch is needed, and sometimes a resolution can be passed by either body or by both bodies in a joint resolution.



Step 9: Signing by the Executive Branch

Bills sent to the executive branch (Mayor, Governor, President) can either be signed into law or vetoed. If an executive vetoes, there is often a higher threshold to override a veto and pass it into law without the executive's signature. But after this final step, the legislation is then passed into law!

After a law is passed, it is often a celebratory moment!

Most bills never become law, so take pride in your role in getting it passed! However, as advocates, there's often more to be done after the ink has dried on the executive's signature.

The next step is to stay informed and involved in the executive branch's implementation of the law. This can take several months or even years after the passage of a law, but staying vigilant and staying prepared to follow up on implementation is important to making sure the government does its jobs and implements the law.



Communicating with Legislators

One of the best ways to advocate for climate action is to communicate with legislators directly and tell them what you would like to see from your government. Here are some tips to make the most out of any communication you have with a legislator.

1. Do your research

- a. It's important to show elected officials that you are well informed, prepared, and that you take the issue seriously, especially if you are a youth advocate. It is so impressive when youth demonstrate as much knowledge, or even more, about policy than the legislators themselves. The best way to do that is to do research. There are many things you should know before even contacting an elected official, including:
 - Who you are contacting and why: you can decide this based on who is best to talk to about climate issues, who represents your district, or who holds leadership positions in the body or in the appropriate committee.
 - For example: If there is a bill to open up a new solar farm, you might want to contact a legislator who is the chairperson or a committee member of a committee with oversight of energy utilities.
 - The bio of the legislator, their platform, and current events of the legislator.
 - Their voting and introduction track record of environmental bills.
 - Current climate related bills up for discussion in your area as well as other jurisdictions.
 - Current events in the community related to environment/climate change
 - Use [Congress's website tool](#) to find your state/territory legislative website!
 - Use [this tool from USA.gov](#) to find your state, local and tribal governments, as well!
 - In these toolkits, you will also find information breaking down climate leaders and climate policy in several states!

- b. It's important to do research before you decide what your ask is because you might find out that the topic that you hope to address is already being discussed by legislators.

2. Decide on your ask and stick to it

An ask to a legislator can be put into two categories: either you are asking them to (1) support a particular bill or resolution, or (2) introduce something completely new. If you are not doing either of these things, it will be very difficult to get tangible deliverables from them.

- If you are deciding on asking for something completely new, consider drafting the bill yourself and giving it to them. This significantly increases the likelihood that the issue will be discussed by the legislature. Drafting legislation is not as hard as you may think, and this toolkit can show you how!
- If you are asking for their support for current legislation, make sure you know what the legislator can do (i.e., vote yes on the legislation, make a motion to move the legislation onto the session floor, amend it in committee, etc.) and explicitly ask them to do it.

3. Decide on the contact method

There are four ways to contact a legislator: via phone, via mail, via email/social media, and face to face. Each has its pros and cons.

1. Phone



- Phone is likely the quickest way to get feedback and speak to a real person.
- You might end up either leaving a message or talking to a staff member, who will take notes and report back to the elected official.
- It is unlikely that the elected official themselves will answer or be available for a phone call.

2. Mail

- Writing letters puts something physical in their office that can be archived and reviewed at any point.
- It will probably be interns or junior staff who will receive and review your letter(s), and they might not have the most influence on the legislator's policy.



3. Email

- Email is the most convenient to write, send, and follow up.
- Your email could get lost in a flood of other emails, so this method may be the least likely to elicit a response.

4. Meetings

- Meetings are the most difficult to secure, but they are by far the most impactful means of engaging with legislators.
- Speaking with a legislator or their staff, results in a meaningful in-person conversation and an opportunity for you to listen to the office's perspective.
- Legislators may be more accessible due to the increasing use of virtual meetings.

4. Structure your argument

Now that you have done the research, chosen your topic, and chosen your medium, make sure to prepare by planning your approach to persuading the legislator. Some topic points to think about include:

- A brief explanation of your topic
- Why the topic is important to the climate movement
- Why the topic relates to the legislator's platform/constituency
- What the opposition says, and why they should support anyway
- What actions the legislator can take on the issue

5. Important notes for your communication

- a. Be polite and thankful! Open your communication or meeting by thanking them for some specific work they've done or congratulating them on a recent accomplishment.
- b. Be clear about what your ask is and remind them of the ask at the end of the meeting.

- c. Make sure that you have follow up action items or conversations with them. Whether it be more info on the issue, a specific document, or a point of contact to give, having a deliverable to give them after the meeting. keeps open a line of communication and allows you to follow up on your ask.
- d. Remember that your elected officials may work for you, but they are their own person with their own desires and agenda. You cannot force elected officials to take up something they do not want to, but you can communicate your desires and use the power of the election to hold them accountable for not meeting your expectations.

Keeping all of this in mind, you should be more than prepared to make successful and effective policy asks!

If you have any questions or need advice or support with your legislative communications, please contact Javan Santos, policy manager at KCI at javan@theclimateinitiative.org.

Guide to Participating in Public Hearings

One of the best ways for youth climate advocates to address climate change is to use their voices! Not all youth are old enough to vote, but no matter your age, you are allowed to participate in public hearings on policies that the government is discussing. By participating, you are telling the government exactly how you hope they will run and why the policy is important to you. Go to your state or local government's website for information on when and where public hearings are held, and follow the tips below!

Tips for Participating

Know the policy!

Learn about the policy that is being discussed and what exactly it will do. Finding articles or press releases on the policy will help you understand what it does, why people support it, and if there's opposition against it. Learning what the policy means will help you form your own stance on the issue, and that will help you decide whether to participate in the public hearing or not.

Know the rules

Each state legislature has its own unique standing rules that might impact the way that you participate in public hearings. For example, some states allow you to testify on a first come, first serve basis. However, in Maine, supporting and opposing testimony must be alternated, which means people who sign up first might not be the first ones to testify. There may be time limits, written submittal, or other requirements to participate in a public hearing. Make sure you communicate with the legislator's office if you are confused and they will help you out.

Keep your testimony concise and on topic

Legislators attend several public hearings a day for weeks at a time. Making sure that you don't have tangents and that your testimony is short but persuasive is important to ensuring your voice is heard.

Relate the policy to real life

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Use data and storytelling appropriately

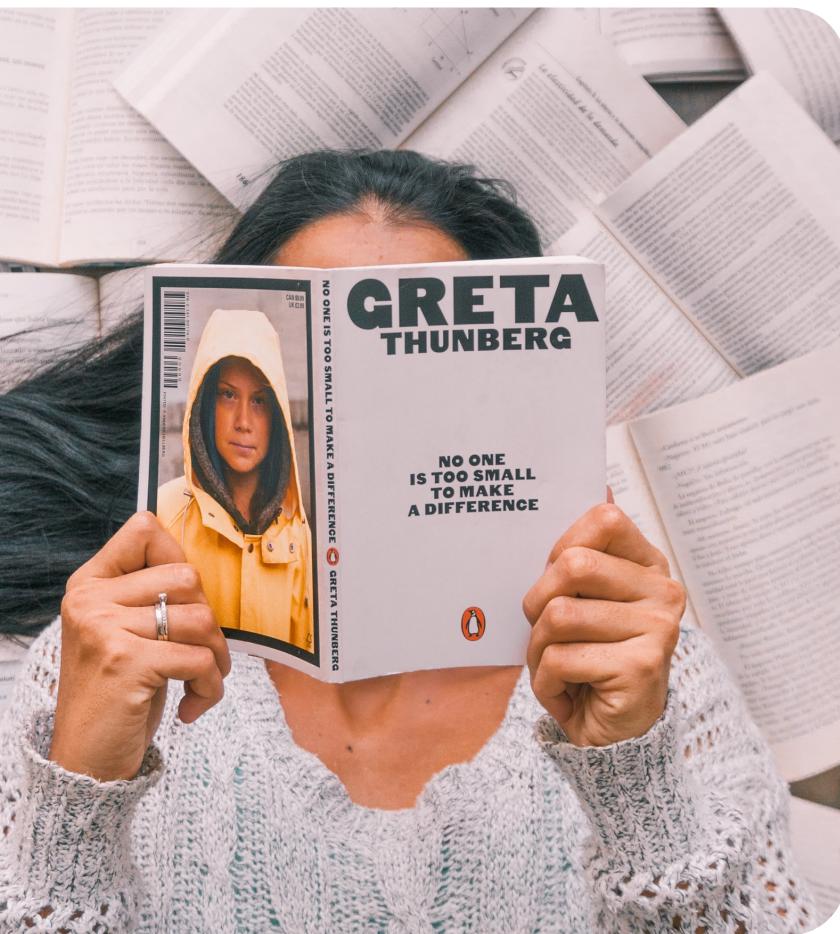
Making your testimony data-driven can provide new information that elected officials did not consider. However, too much data can seem clinical and bog down the public hearing with information. Crafting a narrative that can pull at the heart strings can also be very persuasive to elected officials! However, focusing too much on storytelling could pull focus from the technicalities of the legislation. Deciding whether to lean more on data, story, or a mixture of the two helps to guide you as you work on your public hearing testimony.

Be yourself!

Part of deciding what type of testimony you make is understanding how you feel you'd be the most confident and persuasive and leaning on that in your testimony. No one likes listening to someone who is not being genuine or who does not believe what they're saying. Lean on your strengths and use them in your testimony!

Participating in a public hearing can be daunting, especially if you are a younger person testifying in front of a lot of adults.

However, supporting the youth is an almost universally agreed upon issue by all legislators. It is in their political interest to support and encourage you to be an active participant in the legislative process. Many legislators will applaud you for getting involved, so there is no need to be intimidated by them. They are public servants, working to serve you, so tell them what you want them to do!



Climate Change Advocacy at All Levels of Government

An important part of climate change advocacy is knowing your ideal audience! There are different levels of government, and each level has its own advantages and disadvantages when it comes to advocacy. Understanding the differences will allow you to tailor your advocacy to the change you need.

Federal Government

Pros

- Federal policies are wide sweeping; a federal mandate applies to every single state and jurisdiction in America.
- The federal government is the only one that regulates international affairs, like international trade and foreign relations. If you're looking for change in those realms, this is where you'd go!

Cons

- Federal policies can be slow to pass, and depend on the politics of other states.
- It may be difficult to get legislation for a specific location (i.e., your hometown) passed on the federal level.

Example of Federal Climate Policy: The Green New Deal

State Government

Pros

- The state governments have every authority not vested to the federal government, unless they delegate it to a local government.
- A state law must be followed by all localities, providing a large area for change.
- State legislators have more impact on statewide issues, such as state taxes or the power grid.

Cons

- States cannot make any laws that expressly contradict federal laws, with some exceptions; this may cause a barrier to some types of change.

Example of State Climate Policy: Renewable Portfolio Standards for a state (the goals a state sets for how much of its energy must be from renewable sources)

Tribal Governments

Pros

- Tribal Governments maintain tribal sovereignty, meaning their decisions on climate change are not restricted by federalism, only whatever agreements are found in their constitutions and treaties
- Tribal sovereignty allows for indigenous and other cultural and traditional solutions to climate change

Cons

- Every tribal government has unique limitations based on its constitution and treaty, making it complex to take policies from one tribe and use it in another
- Exists outside of the U.S.'s governmental system, meaning policies created within tribes may have a harder time influencing national policy agendas



Local Governments

Pros

- The local government can handle local concerns quite quickly as their government's jurisdiction is very specific, especially if you're from a small town.
- Laws may be easiest to get passed on the local level because one voice is a larger portion of the population on the local level.
- Small change on the local level can influence policies at the state and national levels. Small wins turn into big wins!

Cons

- Local legislation may be easier and faster, but it might only affect a small area or a small number of people.
- Having environmental policy altered piecemeal throughout the country may not be effective for mitigating climate change or slowing the rise of global temperatures.

Example of a Local Climate Policy: Passing an ordinance mandating the use of solar powered street lights.