Policy Toolkit

A guide to climate policy

Legislative Process

The Climate Initiative

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: javan@theclimateinitiative.org

Javan

Javan Santos
Policy Manager

The Legislative Process

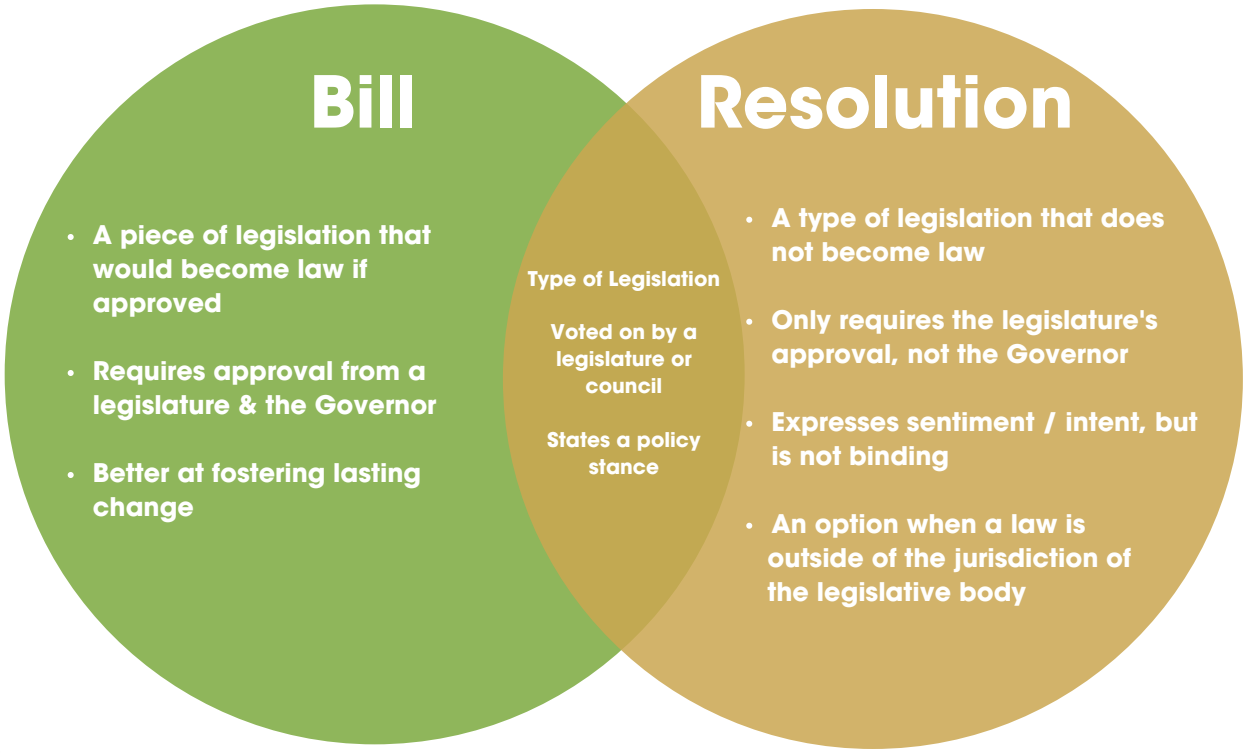
Understanding the legislative process will ensure that you are an informed climate advocate. Legislation is one of the most direct ways that changes are made to our government, which is why many climate advocates look to Congress, state legislatures, and local councils to enact much needed climate change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

Policy Toolkit Survey

Thank you for taking the time to download and utilize one, or all, of our TCI Policy Toolkits!

To ensure that these Policy Toolkits are meeting your needs, please leave any and all feedback that you can to help improve our toolkit offering.

Please take a few minutes to complete a quick survey. You will be entered into our monthly eco-merch giveaway while completing the survey!

Click here to take the survey

Thank you!

Stories of Change

The Climate Initiative

Write it. Speak it. Show it.

Share your climate policy projects *for* the world.

Your story of change will inspire other youth to take meaningful climate action.

In connection with TCI programs, tools, and events, Stories of Change are shaping the way youth and communities across the nation and beyond are taking action on climate change.

We want to hear how utilizing our Toolkits has impacted your climate journey. Your story can encourage other youth to take action.

Click HERE for more information and to submit your Story of Change!