



# Making Your Voice Heard

in the California  
State Legislature

*Compliments of*

**Rob Bonta**  
Assemblymember  
18th District



## California State Assembly

**Rob Bonta**

ASSEMBLYMEMBER, 18TH DISTRICT

Dear Friend:

In order to truly serve the people they were elected to represent, legislators need to hear from their constituents about important issues affecting their lives. Personally contacting your elected representatives is a privilege of democracy and one of the most effective ways to get involved in the political process.

It is important to get involved in the democratic process. You can make your voice heard by contacting your local legislators to voice ideas, ask questions or discuss legislation. This booklet can help grow your confidence in reaching out to advocate on a state issue.

This booklet explains how to read a bill so that you are better able to understand legislation that may affect you and your family. By following these basic tips, you can make your communications more effective and help guarantee a more persuasive advocacy effort.

Please call or write me if you have any questions or concerns about a state matter. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rob Bonta".

**Rob Bonta**

*Assemblymember, 18th District*

**MAKING  
YOUR VOICE  
HEARD  
IN THE  
CALIFORNIA  
STATE  
LEGISLATURE**

**A GUIDE TO  
PARTICIPATION**

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## WRITING A LETTER TO YOUR LEGISLATOR

**ALTHOUGH MANY ISSUES ARE COMPLEX, A SINGLE PAGE WRITTEN IN A CLEAR, CONCISE MANNER IS PREFERRED AND WELCOMED BY MOST LEGISLATORS.**

A personal letter is the most common way of contacting a legislator. Just one letter or e-mail with either a new perspective or a clear, persuasive argument can often influence a legislator's approach to an issue. A legislator may pay more attention to a legislative matter on which he or she has received a large amount of mail.

### **TIPS FOR WRITING TO AN ELECTED OFFICIAL**

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**ADDRESS THE LETTER PROPERLY:** Know your legislator's full name, correct spelling and title. If you are uncertain, call the legislator's office to get the correct information or look it up online at [www.assembly.ca.gov](http://www.assembly.ca.gov).

**ALWAYS INCLUDE YOUR LAST NAME AND YOUR ADDRESS:** A letter cannot be answered if there is no return address or if the signature is not legible. Your address also makes it clear you are a constituent.

**USE YOUR OWN WORDS:** Avoid form letters and petitions. This kind of correspondence tends to be identified as an organized campaign and is often answered with a standard reply. A thoughtful and factual letter carries more weight than a form letter or printed post card. However, petitions are still useful to let legislators know that an issue is important to a large group of individuals.

**TIME THE ARRIVAL OF YOUR LETTER:** Write to your legislator and the chairperson of the committee dealing with the bill in which you are interested while the bill is still in committee. This will ensure there is still time to take effective action.

**BE CLEAR ABOUT THE TOPIC OF YOUR LETTER:** Identify the bill or your issue of concern by referring to the bill's number, its Author, or its popular title-if there is one.

**BE BRIEF AND CONSTRUCTIVE:** If you disagree with the approach of a bill, explain what you believe to be the correct approach.

**GIVE THE REASONS FOR YOUR OPINION:** Explain how an issue would affect you, your family, community, business or profession. Concrete, expert arguments for or against a bill can often influence a legislator's opinion. You may also want to include articles, editorials or other supporting materials to help make your point.

July 1, 2013

The Honorable Terry Smith  
State Capitol  
P. O. Box 942849  
Sacramento, CA 94249-0001

Dear Assemblymember Smith:

I am writing to you in support of Assembly Bill 5231, by Assemblymember Cooley, which will be heard in the Assembly Committee on Business and Professions next month.

This bill will help our Customer Service industry by:

- Requiring state agencies to provide a live operator to answer the phones during regular business hours
- Improve customer service in state government
- Ensure state government is accessible, efficient and responsive

Thank you for taking the time to consider my concerns regarding this measure. Please keep me informed on the progress of this bill.

Sincerely,

*Chris Anderson*

Chris Anderson  
4321 Oak View Circle  
Springfield, CA 99002  
(415) 555-1212

## FOLLOWING SAMPLE LETTER GUIDELINES

**INDICATE THE PROPER NAME, TITLE AND ADDRESS OF THE LEGISLATOR.**

**IDENTIFY THE BILL BY NUMBER AND AUTHOR AND STATE WHETHER YOU ARE IN OPPOSITION OR SUPPORT.**

**LIST THE EFFECTS THE BILL COULD HAVE ON YOU OR YOUR COMMUNITY.**

**CLOSE WITH A REQUEST FOR MORE INFORMATION.**

**ALWAYS INCLUDE YOUR NAME, HOME ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE NUMBER.**

A personal visit with your legislator is a great way to communicate your viewpoint; however, it can also be one of the hardest to arrange in a busy schedule. Personal visits allow both of you to connect names with faces and allow you to establish yourself as a concerned constituent.

## WHEN MEETING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

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### **SCHEDULE A MEETING IN ADVANCE:**

Call ahead to make an appointment — do not unexpectedly show up.

Let the legislator's aide know what you want to discuss. Be as specific as

possible so that your legislator and his or her staff can prepare materials which they may want to provide to you.

**IF YOU ARE REPRESENTING A GROUP, LET THE LEGISLATOR KNOW:** When you introduce yourself make it clear who you are and what organization, if any, you are working with.

### **DON'T FEEL SLIGHTED IF YOU END UP MEETING WITH A STAFF MEMBER:**

A legislator will often have you meet with trusted staff members who attend meetings and conduct other duties on behalf of the legislator. You should provide the same information to the staff member as you would the legislator.

**DO YOUR HOMEWORK AND BE PREPARED:** Be concise and try to anticipate direct and challenging questions, and prepare your answers before the meeting.

**BRING MATERIALS THAT HELP MAKE YOUR POINT:** If you have statistical information or studies to back up your views, bring copies to give to your legislator.

**LET LEGISLATORS EXPLAIN THEIR VIEWS:** They often have input from many sources, such as fiscal agencies, state departments or other groups with expertise on the issue.

**FOLLOW UP:** Shortly after meeting with your legislator, give him or her a call or follow up with a thank-you note.

## VISITING YOUR LEGISLATOR IN PERSON

ATTENDING  
HEARINGS,  
WORKSHOPS,  
AND DISTRICT  
EVENTS PROVIDE  
OPPORTUNITIES TO  
MEET PERSONALLY  
WITH YOUR  
LEGISLATOR.

Telephoning a legislator is another important way to make personal contact. Elected officials often keep track of and count the number of phone calls in favor of or against an issue.

## **WHEN TELEPHONING AN ELECTED OFFICIAL**

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### **DON'T EXPECT TO TALK DIRECTLY TO A LEGISLATOR ON YOUR FIRST CALL:**

A call to a legislator's office is usually answered by staff who will note your request or your position on a bill. This information will be passed on to the legislator. If you're calling to request background information or to discuss a particular issue, your call may be transferred to the staff person responsible for that particular issue area.

**INTRODUCE YOURSELF CLEARLY:** Be sure to provide the staff member with your name and address. This will help ensure that you will receive any helpful follow-up information.

**TRY TO COVER ONLY ONE SUBJECT PER CALL:** If there is a pending vote on a bill, your phone call should be simple and to the point. The information will be taken down and forwarded to the appropriate staff person.

**KEEP YOUR COMMENTS BRIEF:** Be prepared to state your position, what you want the legislator to consider doing, and be ready to support your position with one or more well thought-out arguments.


### **THANK LEGISLATORS FOR THEIR RESPONSE:**

If a legislator or his or her staff does not have an immediate response to your request, ask when you can expect an answer. When you receive a reply, be sure to thank the legislator for getting back to you, even if the legislator's position is not the same as yours.



## **PHONING YOUR LEGISLATOR**

**TELEPHONE CALLS TO A LEGISLATOR ARE MOST USEFUL WHEN A VOTE WILL QUICKLY BE TAKEN AND THERE IS LITTLE TIME TO WRITE OR VISIT A LEGISLATOR'S OFFICE.**



Timing is important in the legislative process. A phone call or letter has more significance if it is close to the time a vote is to be taken. In order to make the best use of your lobbying efforts, it is important that you know the steps in the legislative process. Once you are familiar with this process, you should map out a plan or strategy to increase your effectiveness.

## **THE CALIFORNIA STATE LEGISLATURE**

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California has a bicameral (two-house) Legislature composed of the Assembly and the Senate. The Assembly has 80 members who serve two-year terms; the Senate has 40 members who serve four-year terms. Each legislator can serve for a maximum of 12 years in one or both houses. Every California resident is represented by one Assemblymember and one Senator.

## **HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW**

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Ideas for legislation come from a variety of sources, including an individual or group who will ask a legislator to author a bill. The individual or group then becomes the sponsor of the bill.

The proposal or idea must first go to the Legislative Counsel who prepares it in the form of a bill draft. After the author reviews the bill draft, it is taken to the Chief Clerk's desk if the author is an Assemblymember, or the Secretary of the Senate's desk if the author is a Senator. The bill is assigned a number, introduced and read a first time.

The bill is then assigned to the Rules Committee of the appropriate house (Senate or Assembly), which refers the measure to the appropriate policy committee for a public hearing to discuss the merits of the bill and to vote on whether or not to "pass" the bill. The Legislature does most of its work in committees. Each committee has responsibility for a specific area of policy.

If the bill passes a policy committee, it then goes to the Assembly or Senate floor (depending on the bill's house of origin) where it is voted on by all the members of that house. However, bills that have a financial impact on the state must also be reviewed and passed by a fiscal committee before moving to the floor. After a bill is approved on the floor, it must go through the same process in the other house.

Opportunities to influence the outcome of a bill are provided at each point in the legislative process.

**KNOWING THE  
LEGISLATIVE  
PROCESS WILL  
HELP YOUR  
MESSAGE BE  
HEARD**

**THE COMMITTEE  
CHAIR AND MEMBERS  
SHOULD BE  
CONTACTED PRIOR  
TO A HEARING ON AN  
ISSUE WHICH YOU  
INTEND TO INFLUENCE.**



You may also testify in committees in support of, or against a legislative proposal. It is best to contact the author of the bill and let him or her know you would like to testify. If you are in opposition to the bill, make sure you let the author's office know your position well in advance so the legislator or staff can contact you before the hearing to discuss the bill. The author may agree to amend the bill before it is heard in committee.

## **WHEN TESTIFYING IN COMMITTEE**

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Coordinate your testimony with others testifying on the bill to ensure that statements before the committee will be to the point and not redundant. If there are many witnesses speaking on a measure or if the committee has a long agenda, the committee chair may decide to place a time limit on your testimony.


After your testimony, be sure to thank the chair of the committee and the committee members for the opportunity to express your views.



**Before you testify, state your full name, your organization affiliation, if any, and whether you support or oppose the measure.**

## **TESTIFYING IN SUPPORT OF OR IN OPPOSITION TO A BILL**

**STATE YOUR NAME,  
ORGANIZATION AND IF  
YOU ARE IN SUPPORT  
OR OPPOSITION OF  
THE BILL AND WHY.**



Each bill is generally heard (debated) and voted on at least four times before passing the Legislature—first by the policy committees and then by the full membership of each house. If the bill has a fiscal impact, it is required to be heard first in a fiscal committee before going to either the Assembly or the Senate floor. Each committee and floor vote provides an opportunity to present your input through a letter, phone call or meeting, but it is also an opportunity for bills to be amended. Therefore, it is important that you stay current on the bill’s status.

Newsletters and the media are very helpful sources for keeping current on a particular piece of legislation. There are also official legislative publications which can be obtained in public libraries, legislators’ offices, the Capitol Bill Room and on the Internet.

## **SOURCES OF LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION**

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**ASSEMBLY (OR SENATE) DAILY FILE:** Printed each day the Legislature is in session, the Daily File includes a listing of bills set for hearing in committee and bills to be voted on by the full Assembly or Senate.

**ASSEMBLY (OR SENATE) WEEKLY HISTORY:** The Weekly Histories indicate the status of each piece of legislation.

**ASSEMBLY (OR SENATE) DAILY JOURNAL:** The Daily Journal is the official record of proceedings on the Assembly or Senate Floor.

**LEGISLATIVE INDEX:** The Index contains a complete listing, by subject matter, of all bills introduced. You may also want to contact your legislator’s district office to receive an update on the status of legislation.

**ASSEMBLY HOMEPAGE ONLINE INTERNET:** All of the above and more can be found on the Assembly Homepage. Did you know you can “subscribe” to your choice of bills and automatically receive free e-mail updates on legislation, including amendments, analyses, and committee and floor votes? The Assembly’s webpage address is: [www.assembly.ca.gov](http://www.assembly.ca.gov). (For more information on the Assembly Homepage, see pages 10-11.)

## **KEEPING UP ON LEGISLATION**

**KEEPING CURRENT ON  
THE STATUS OF A BILL  
IS ESSENTIAL TO AN  
INFORMED ADVOCACY  
EFFORT.**

Although communicating directly with your elected officials is one of the most effective methods of making your voice heard, there are other indirect ways to raise their awareness of issues that are important to you. You can write an op-ed (guest editorial); send a letter to the editor of a local paper; making one's own blog, or commenting on one. You can also use social media to communicate your ideas.

## HOW TO WRITE AN EDITORIAL OR LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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**GET TO THE POINT:** Your first paragraph should concisely summarize the main point of your letter.

**ESTABLISH YOUR CREDIBILITY AND WRITE ABOUT WHAT YOU KNOW:** Your commentary should speak with some authority. This authority is established by stating your expertise or personal experience with the issue. Your education, years of work experience, affiliations or official position are important facts that should be included in your letter to help establish your credibility.

**BE BRIEF:** A letter to the editor should be fewer than 200 words, and an op-ed no more than 600 - 700 words.

**LOOK FOR A "HOOK":** Editors are more likely to publish your letter or op-ed if you refer to a current issue. Letters to the editor should always be responding to a recent news article.

**TAKE A POSITION:** Your goal is to present a particular position and not simply to "report" on an issue. Provide evidence that supports your position.

**TRY TO MAKE PERSONAL CONTACT:** Call the paper and ask for the name of the person who reviews letters and op-eds from the public. Call that person a few days after you send your letter or article and ask whether the paper will print it.



## ADVOCACY THROUGH THE MEDIA

**EDITORS OFTEN APPRECIATE RECEIVING WELL-WRITTEN OPINION PIECES. LEGISLATORS AND THEIR STAFF PAY ATTENTION TO THESE PIECES, ESPECIALLY ONES WHICH APPEAR IN THEIR LOCAL NEWSPAPERS.**



## ACCESSING THE LEGISLATURE THROUGH THE INTERNET

**WITH A COMPUTER  
AND INTERNET  
ACCESS, YOU CAN  
COMMUNICATE  
DIRECTLY WITH YOUR  
LEGISLATOR AND  
LET YOUR VIEWS BE  
KNOWN.**

One of the most efficient and convenient methods of contacting your legislator is using your computer to access the California State Assembly Webpage at **[www.assembly.ca.gov](http://www.assembly.ca.gov)**. At this site you will find a wealth of information about your State Legislature, its day-to-day activities, legislation and your representative. Additionally, you can:

- Communicate with your Assemblymember by e-mail.
- Get information about past and present bills.
- Create a personal “Subscribe List” and automatically receive free bill updates via e-mail.

### **KEEP UP-TO-DATE AUTOMATICALLY**

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If you’re interested in keeping track of specific legislation, here’s an easy way to create a personal “Subscription List” and automatically receive free e-mail updates on bill changes:

- Click the “Find Legislation” link.
- Click “Bill Information.”
- Type in the bill author, number or subject; click “Search.”
- Click “Track Bill” when bill information is displayed.
- Register or enter login.
- Enter your e-mail address; click “OK.”
- Choose notification options and click the “Add Notifications” button.

### **LET YOUR VIEWS BE KNOWN**

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If you want to send an e-mail to your legislator:

- Locate your legislator’s contact page under “Members.”
- Write a short letter (one page if possible) in a clear and concise manner.
- Identify measures by bill number and indicate your opposition or support.
- Close with a request for more information.
- Always include your full name, home address and telephone number.



## WWW.ASSEMBLY.CA.GOV

*Explore these links and more:*

**MEMBERS:** Contains a listing of all Assemblymembers, with photographs and links to their individual websites, where you will find Capitol and district addresses, phone numbers and e-mail listings, as well as biographies, personal bill lists, committees and links to each district.

**COMMITTEES:** Lists all legislative committees, memberships and functions. Policy committee hearings provide the best opportunity for public comment.

**SCHEDULES & PUBLICATIONS:** Contains the Daily File — the Legislature's daily agenda indicating which bills are being heard and at what time; and the Legislative Deadlines Calendar, which shows constitutional timeline requirements, legislative deadlines, session recesses and adjournments.


**FIND MY REPRESENTATIVE:** Enter your home address and find out who your representative is in the State Assembly. A map locating your home in relationship to your Assemblymember's office is displayed.

**FIND LEGISLATION:** Provides the text of bills, resolutions and constitutional amendments. Also shows bill status, history, votes, analyses and vetoes. Search by bill number, keyword or author to create a personal bill "Subscription List."



**EXPLORE  
THE STATE  
ASSEMBLY  
WEBSITE**

**GO ONLINE TO  
LEARN ABOUT  
MEMBERS, DISTRICTS,  
COMMITTEES,  
PUBLICATIONS,  
BILL STATUS,  
AND MORE.**



## IDENTIFYING TYPES OF STATE LEGISLATION

**DIFFERENT TYPES OF  
LEGISLATION REQUIRE  
DIFFERENT VOTE  
MAJORITIES TO PASS.**

### **ASSEMBLY OR SENATE BILL**

An Assembly Bill (AB) or Senate Bill (SB), the most common type of legislation, proposes changes to current laws or enacts new ones. These bills require a majority vote (41 in the Assembly, 21 in the Senate), unless the bills contain a general fund appropriation or an urgency clause, in which case they require a two-thirds vote for passage. All bills that amend the Political Reform Act also require a two-thirds vote.

All bills passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor take effect on January 1 of the following year, unless the legislation specifies otherwise or the measure contains an urgency clause, in which case the measure takes effect immediately upon receiving the Governor's signature.

### **ASSEMBLY OR SENATE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT**

An Assembly Constitutional Amendment (ACA) or Senate Constitutional Amendment (SCA) proposes a change to the State Constitution. All constitutional amendments require a two-thirds vote of the Legislature; they are then placed on the ballot of the next statewide general election, unless otherwise stated, where they must receive a majority vote of the people before they are enacted into law. ACAs and SCAs do not require the signature of the Governor.

### **ASSEMBLY OR SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION**

An Assembly Concurrent Resolution (ACR) or Senate Concurrent Resolution (SCR) is used to adopt joint rules, create joint committees or direct executive departments of state government to provide information to the Legislature. A majority vote of both houses is required. Resolutions do not require the signature of the Governor, nor do they have the force of law.

### **ASSEMBLY OR SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION**

An Assembly Joint Resolution (AJR) or Senate Joint Resolution (SJR) is used to convey the position of the Legislature on a particular issue. A majority vote of both houses is required. The signature of the Governor is not required.

### **HOUSE RESOLUTION**

A House Resolution (HR) amends the rules of the Legislature, requests the creation of committees or requires that a particular action be taken by a committee. A majority vote of both houses is required.

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 123

Introduced by Assembly Member Bonta

January 14, 2015

AN ACT TO ADD SECTION 51221.2 TO THE EDUCATION CODE, RELATING TO pupil instruction.

TO THE SENATE

AB 123, as introduced, Bonta, Pupil instruction, social sciences, farm labor movement, Filipinos

Existing law requires a school district, as part of its adopted course of study for grades 7 to 12, inclusive, to offer courses in specified areas of study, including, among others, social sciences, drawing upon the disciplines of anthropology, economics, geography, history, political science, psychology, and sociology.

This bill would require a school district, in providing instruction in the area of social sciences, to include instruction on the contributions of Filipino Americans to the farm labor movement in California, thereby improving a state-mandated local program.

The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that, if the Commission on State Mandates determines that the bill contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement for those costs shall be made pursuant to those statutory provisions.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes.  
State-mandated local program: yes

## READING AN ASSEMBLY BILL

**BILLS ARE NUMBERED SEQUENTIALLY IN EACH HOUSE OVER THE TWO-YEAR LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

**AUTHOR AND CO-AUTHORS OF THE BILL**

**INDICATES HOUSE OF ORIGIN**

**CALIFORNIA CODE SECTIONS AFFECTED**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S SUMMARY OF THE MEASURE, FOLLOWED BY THE TEXT OF THE BILL**



# California State Assembly

## Rob Bonta

ASSEMBLYMEMBER, 18TH DISTRICT

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click on "Contact Rob"

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**ASSEMBLY WEBSITE:**

[www.asm.ca.gov](http://www.asm.ca.gov)

