



# **California: Legislators & the Legislative Process - A Primer**

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350 Bay Area Action  
350 Contra Costa Action  
February 25, 2025

# Agenda

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## High- Level Introduction

- The California Legislature
- The Legislative Process
- The Legislative Year
- Active Advocacy – Summary

**Goal:** Use legislative process as a tool for action





Senate President pro Tempore Mike McGuire gives closing speech thanking the legislators and staff for their hard work during one of the Senate's deadline weeks.

[CA State Senate website](#)

# The California Legislature

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## The Senate and the Assembly

# California's Bicameral Legislature

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Number of Senators and Assemblymembers not changed since 1879

## 40 Senators

- 988K people – Highest number of constituents in U.S.
- 4 year terms

## 80 Assembly members

- 494K+ people – Highest number of constituents of any lower U.S. House
- 2 year terms

Lifetime term limit: **12 years** in any combination of Senate or Assembly terms.

2023 and 2025 legislatures most diverse in CA history!

- Given district size and term limits, Grassroots "education" is key.

## California's legislature meets throughout the year.

- 2024: 2,124 bills introduced
- 2023: 2600 – most in a decade. 40% to Gov.

2025: New cap on # of bills per two-year session

- Senate: 35 (formerly 40)
- Assembly: 35 (formerly 50)

Democrats have 2/3 supermajorities in both houses

- Senate: 30 Dem; 10 Rep
- Assembly: 60 Dem; 19 Rep – 1 vacant

A 2/3 majority is enough to pass taxes and override vetoes, **BUT** a sizable number of Democrats are moderate/conservative

**Key: Know what motivates your legislator!**

# **A Full-Time Legislature**

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Speaker of the Assembly – Robert Rivas (D-Hollister) June 30, 2023  
Serving rural district since 2018 – Chaired Assembly Agriculture. As San Benito County Supervisor, pushed through state’s first county-wide fracking ban 2014

- Became Speaker in 2023 by moving out Assm Rendon (LA area).
- More cautious as Speaker than in Assembly, but takes active role with Cttees. Coordination with pro Tem and Governor continue to evolve.



## Know the Leaders

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Pro Tem of the Senate – Mike McGuire (D-SD 2) February, 2024  
Serving North CA coast from SF Bay to Oregon since 2014

- Selected with approval of former pro Tem, Toni Atkins (San Diego).
- His office acknowledges taking a ‘micro-mgt.’ role but will NOT always do so. Coordination with Gov and Speaker still evolving.

**Other Key Leaders:** Committee Chairs. Appropriations and Budget Committees particularly powerful. Chairs can stop a bill from being heard.



# **From Bill to Law**

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The Journey

# The Legislative Session

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Legislature runs in two year 'sessions.'  
New sessions start in odd-numbered years.

- Year 1 – December/January – Sept
- Year 2 – January – August

Shorter Year 2 - allows for campaigning

All Assembly and ½ of Senate elected in even numbered years.

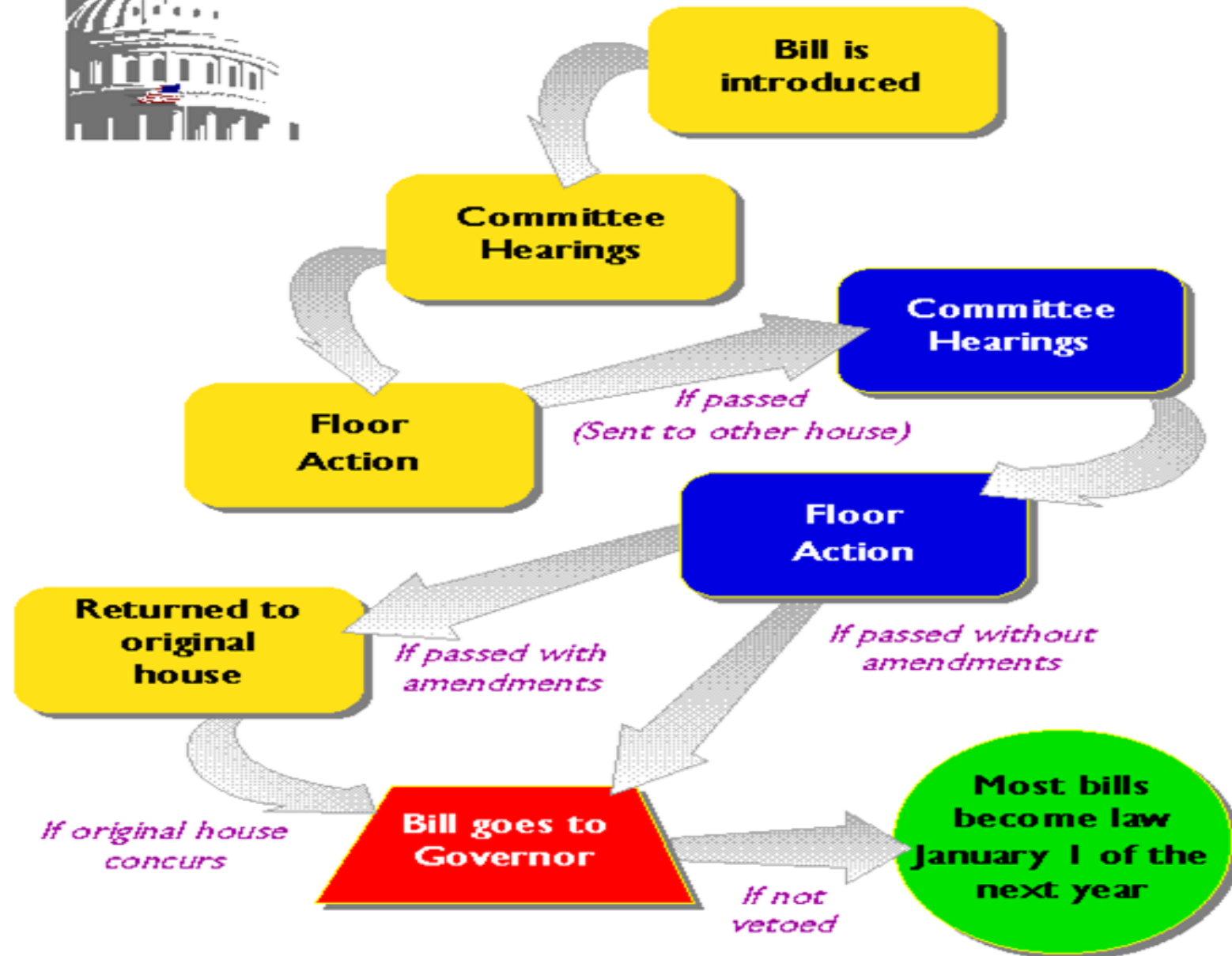
Bills begin in either house, and can be introduced in year 1 or year 2.

- Bills introduced in Year 1 can pass that year, OR
- Become “two year” bills. **Two-year bills** are held over from Year 1 – and don't die.
  - If bill passes to the 2nd House in Year 1 - it picks up where it left off in the 2nd House in Year 2.
  - If bill has not passed 1st House in Year 1, it must pass to the 2nd House by Jan 31 in Year 2 of the session.
- Bills introduced in Year 2 – pass or die
- Bills must pass through both the Senate and Assembly before going to Governor.





# How a Bill Becomes a Law



# Variations on a Bill's Journey

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## Urgency measure – Polluters Pay Climate Superfund – SB 684 and AB 1243

- Urgency measure/bill = necessary to preserve the public's health, safety, or peace
- Requires 2/3 vote in both houses
- Signed immediately on passage and goes into effect immediately.
- Don't have to follow all timelines required of other bills.

## Constitutional Amendment – ACA 16 – Environmental Rights – Green Amend

- Requires 2/3 vote in both houses to pass. Gov's signature not needed to go on ballot. Takes effect if passed by majority of voters

## Gut and Amend - SB 1137 - Oil & Gas Health Protection Zone, SB 905-CCS, etc.

- Bill amended to remove the current contents in their entirety and replace them with different provisions.
- Pros & cons. Critical issues can be put into bills later in a session, after key deadlines have passed, but is there sufficient public debate, fiscal review and investigation of the new issues?
- Gut and amends can be useful (pass a bill pass that did not have another path or is late breaking) , e.g. SB 1137 - originally Atkins and payments in judicial emergencies and became set-backs. Also Skinner's use of SB 233 to address abortion access.
- BUT it can be a procedure to push through a bill without full public vetting, very late in the session. SB 905 (initially Skinner decarb using CCS in cement) – Ultimately - establish CCS program and procedures for CA.



# The Legislative Year

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Milestones & Guardrails

# Year -1 of a Two Year Session

2025 starts a new Legislative session!

Month	Legislative Deadline	Actions for Advocates
January 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1/1: Statues take effect. &amp; 1/6: Legislature reconvenes</li> <li>1/10: Budget must be submitted by Gov</li> <li>1/24: Last day to submit new bill requests to Office of Leg counsel</li> </ul>	<p>Review/research bills and ID ones to follow.</p> <p>ID coalitions to work with.</p> <p>Reach out to legislators re their bills.</p>
February – early May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>2/21: Last day for bills to be introduced</u></li> <li><b>2/24 – 5/2: Policy committees meet to hear/amend new bills.</b></li> <li>4/10 - 4/20 – Spring Recess</li> <li>5/2: last day for policy ctees to send “fiscal” bills introduced in their house to Appropriations</li> </ul>	<p>Finalize positions on bills - at least until amendments.</p> <p>Write letters of support/opposition, and join with coalitions/partners.</p> <p>Meet with legislators</p>
May!!! A deciding month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>5/5 - 5/23: Appropriations/suspense process!</b></li> <li>5/23 - Appropriations done. Surviving bills sent to floor.</li> <li><b>5/27 – 6/6: Floor votes on bills introduced in 2025.</b></li> <li>6/6: Bills must pass to second house or die (unless 2/3)</li> </ul>	<p>Provide Appropriations with data to support bill –</p> <p>Floor alerts &amp; letters/calls to ALL legislators - especially helpful if constituent.</p>

# Year 1 of a Two Year Session – cont.

Month	Legislative Deadlines	Actions for Advocates
June - July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6/9 – 7/18: Second House Policy Cttee hearings take place.</li> <li>June 15: Budget bill must be passed</li> <li>7/18: Last day for policy cttees in second house to send bills to Appropriations</li> <li>7/18– 8/17: Summer Recess!</li> </ul>	<p>Write letters of support, and join with coalitions/partners to push bills to 2<sup>nd</sup> house Appro.</p> <p>Set next round of meetings with legislators during recess</p>
August – September = controlled chaos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8/18 – 8/29: Leg returns &amp; Appropriations/suspense process in full swing.</li> <li>8/29: Appropriations finalize bills to send to floor of second house</li> <li>9/2 - 9/12: Floor votes in second house –</li> <li>9/5: last day to amend on floor (Friday)</li> <li>9/12: Last day to pass bills.</li> </ul>	<p>Prepare Appropriations data supporting bill if need. Goal – push bill to floor</p> <p>Submit support letters/alerts for floor vote. Actively advocate – especially if constituent.</p>
October	10/12: Governor signs, vetoes, or ignores bill (it still becomes law)	Exert pressure on Gov to sign bills. Individual, group, and public pressure
October - December		Get NEW bill ideas to legislators for next year.

# Active Advocacy: Summary

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Legislative process appears straightforward – But this is a political process – People are key.

- Get to know your legislator and better yet the staff, especially if your legislator is new.
- ID your legislator's cttees and if they are Chair, e.g. Buffy Wicks. Constituents are golden.
- Policy committees have their own staff and rules – research them. NB: Committee staff can be VERY helpful, and sources of institutional knowledge. Use old tech – call them.
- **Networks and coalitions are key to success.**

- Use the legislative calendar as a guide to schedule visits, outreach efforts, communications blasts, lobby actions, etc.
  - Most opportunity for public comment when bills in policy committees.
  - Lobby days = critical tools organized by larger orgs. Lots in April & May & August.
  - Recess = good time to catch Legislators.





# Thank you

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