



Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence  
**ACTION ALLIANCE**



# **Legislative Advocacy in Virginia**

## **A primer for sexual and domestic violence advocates**

## The Action Alliance is Virginia's leading voice on sexual and domestic violence.

### As an **advocacy organization**, we provide the expertise needed to ensure an effective response.

We train professionals and ensure that Sexual & Domestic Violence Agencies across Virginia meet standards that affirm/safeguard quality responses to survivors.

Our public policy work builds relationships with key decision makers to strengthen state laws that help make victims safer and hold offenders accountable.



We share our fresh ideas and effective tools to address root causes of violence, recognizing that violence will always exist where oppression is present. Our prevention work promotes healthy communities and relationships so that violence doesn't happen in the first place.



### As a **service provider**, we offer people resources for making informed choices.

We operate the statewide Virginia Statewide Hotline, LGBTQ Partner Abuse & Sexual Assault Helpline, and PREA Hotline (for incarcerated individuals who have experienced sexual violence) and develop resources for Virginia communities.



We operate the Project for Empowerment of Survivors (PES) to offer trauma-informed legal information, advice, and referrals to callers from Virginia who are experiencing sexual or intimate partner violence, dating violence, human trafficking and hate crimes.

We offer support and safety planning to people in crisis, friends and families, and professionals. Our advocates provide a lifeline to survivors so they can reclaim their lives.

### As a **membership organization**, we build diverse alliances across the state.

We create an inclusive network of agencies, individuals, task forces and caucuses to speak in a unified and powerful voice.

We are survivors, advocates, attorneys, law enforcement, health professionals, educators, and community members. We are stronger because of our diversity, and we believe in one principle: *everyone deserves to live a life free of violence.*

# OBJECTIVES

- VA's legislature & the legislative process – civics refresher!
- Stay informed - advocating for/following bills
- Preparation & making contact with legislators
- Follow up & what's next?



# VIRGINIA'S LEGISLATURE

VA's legislature is one of 3 branches of government in VA:

- Legislative Branch
- Executive Branch
- Judicial Branch

The Legislative Branch is made up primarily of the Virginia House of Delegates and the Virginia Senate. These two bodies make up the General Assembly.



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# VIRGINIA'S LEGISLATURE



## The General Assembly

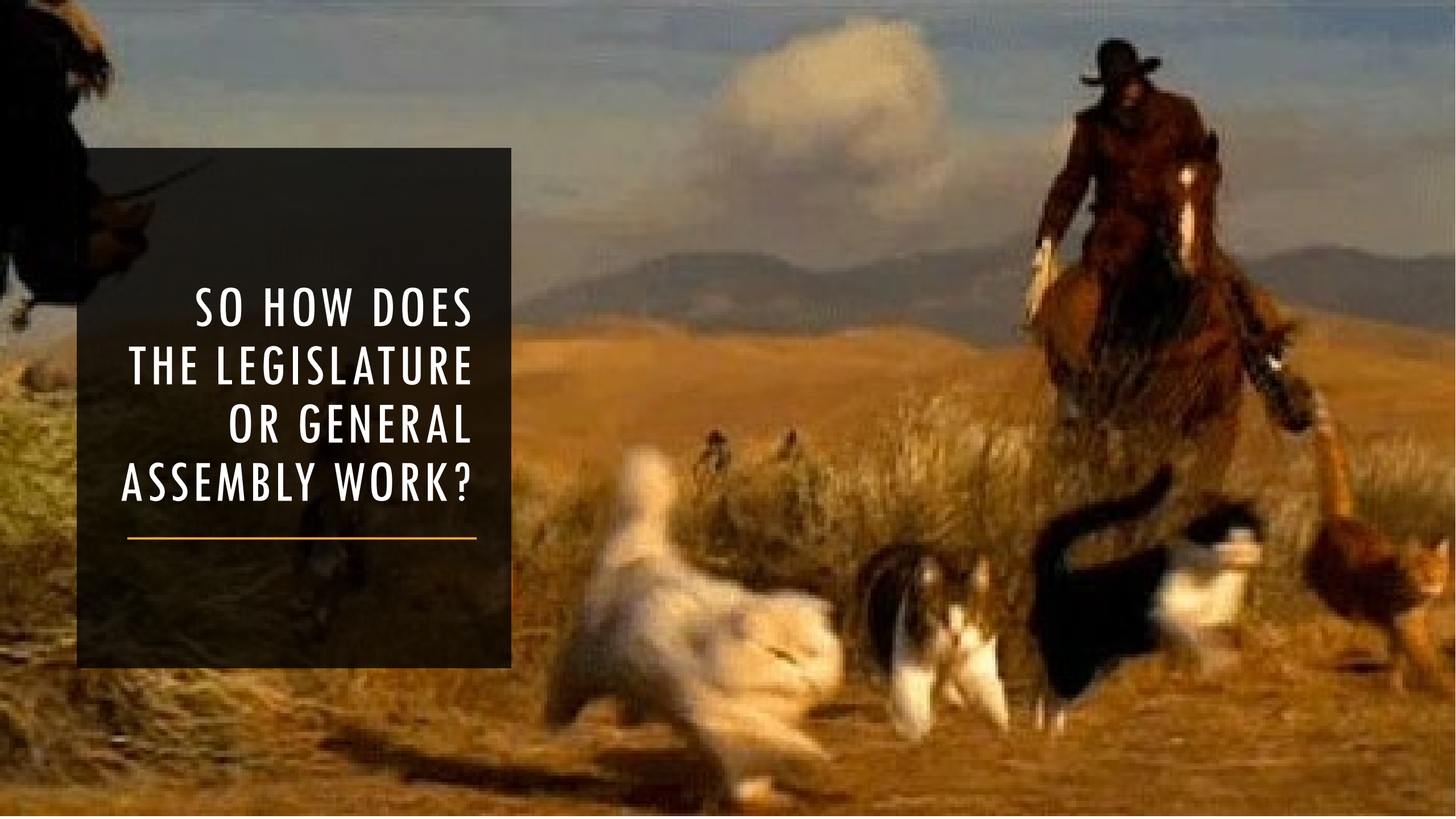
### Virginia House of Delegates

- 100 House Districts/State Delegates
- The party (**Republican** or **Democrat**) with a majority of House seats has voting + administrative power

### Senate of Virginia

- 40 Senate Districts/State Senators
- The party (**Republican** or **Democrat**) with a majority of Senate seats has voting + administrative power



A cowboy on a brown horse is herding a group of sheep in a golden field. The scene is captured in a cinematic style with warm, golden light, likely during sunrise or sunset. The cowboy is wearing a dark hat and is positioned on the right side of the frame, facing left. The sheep are scattered across the field, some running and some standing. In the background, there are rolling hills and a cloudy sky. A dark, semi-transparent rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing white text.

SO HOW DOES  
THE LEGISLATURE  
OR GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY WORK?

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# HOW IT ALL WORKS

The General Assembly convenes in Richmond for **Session** every year on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday in January.

## **LONG SESSION**

- Even numbered years with 60 calendar days of meeting

## **SHORT SESSION**

- Odd numbered years with 30 calendar days, though it is customarily extended to 46 days

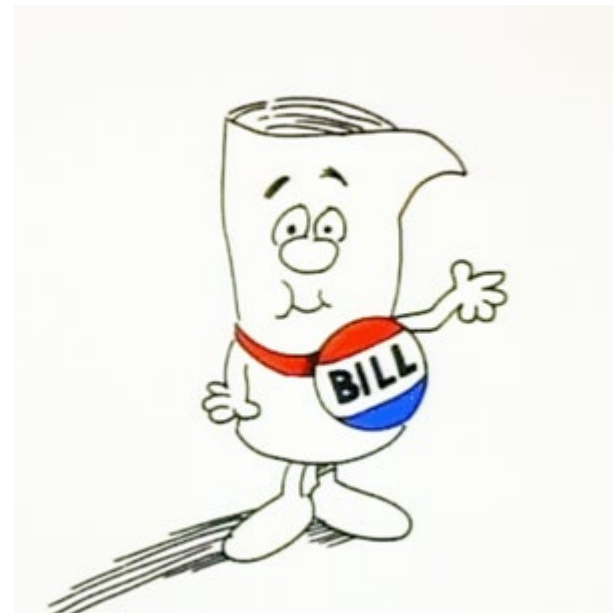


# 2 MAJOR TASKS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Adopt a state budget



Draft bills to become law





# VIRGINIA'S BUDGET

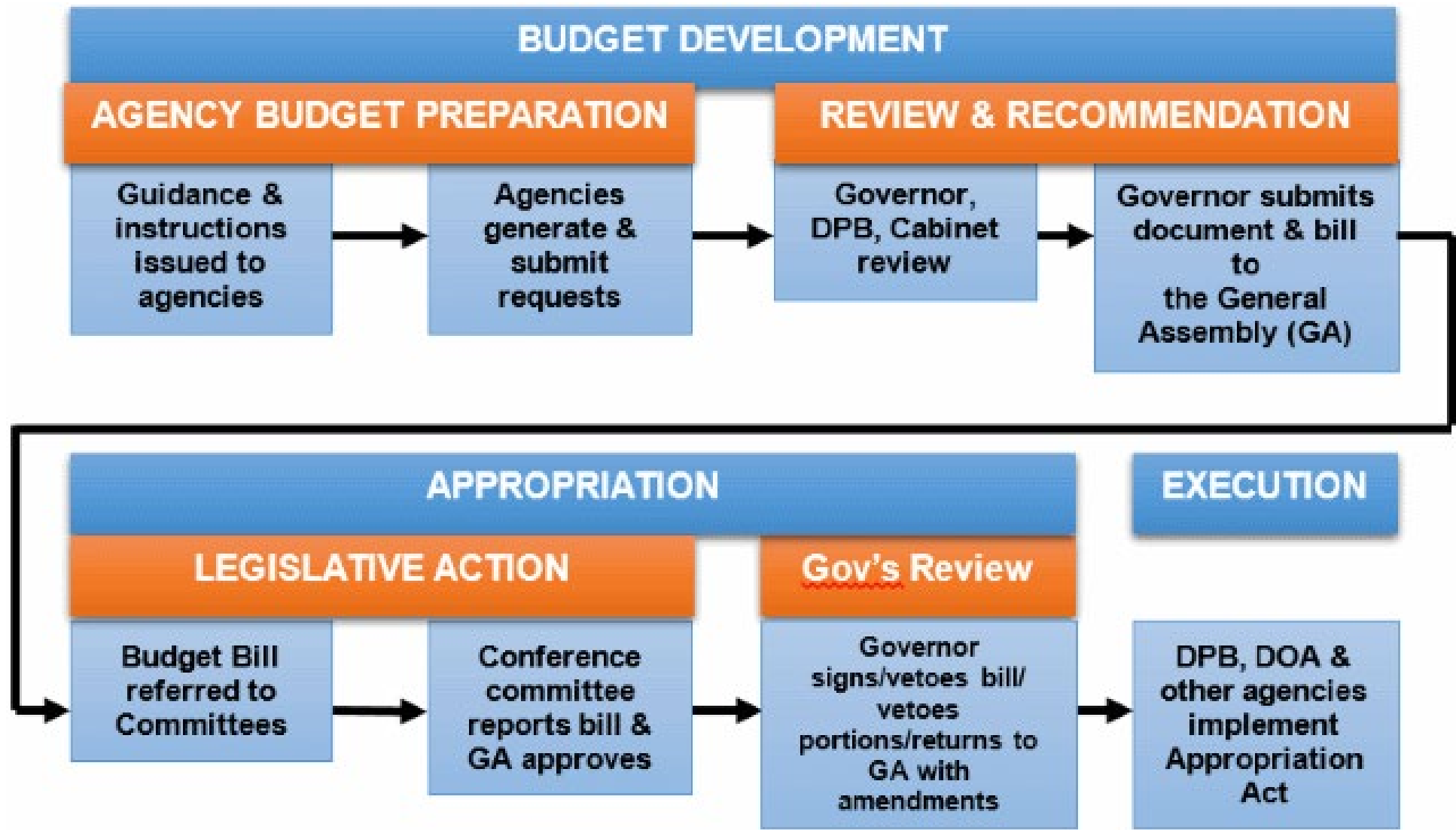


VA's Budget is introduced by the Executive Branch to the General Assembly for review, amendments, and approval during **long sessions, or even numbered years.**

During **short sessions, or in odd numbered years,** budget amendments are proposed by the Executive Branch and then debated and approved by the General Assembly.



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# VIRGINIA'S BUDGET



So when we're advocating for a "budget item", here's what that means:

- A Delegate and/or Senator is carrying a budget request to their \$\$ Committee on our behalf.
- Our legislative advocacy work is focused primarily on \$\$ Committee members who might influence the final budget sent to the Gov.



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# VIRGINIA'S BUDGET



## Sexual/Domestic Violence \$\$ in Budget

### Domestic Violence Services:

- Family Violence Prevention Program funding to VDSS
- State/TANF funding to VDSS

### Sexual Violence Services:

- State funding to DCJS

### Sexual and Domestic Violence Prevention:

- State funding to VDSS

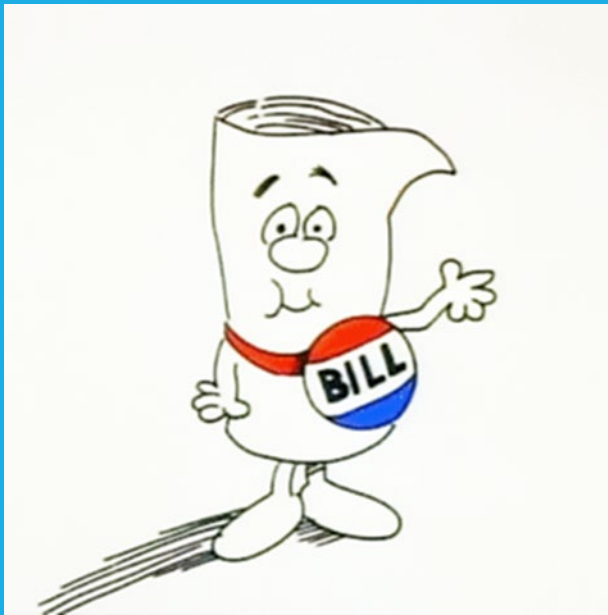


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# BILLS, BILLS, BILLS.

## Where do bills come from?

- Ideas for bills often originate from the legislator themselves, citizens, or advocacy groups.
- The idea/issue and potential solutions are researched (using local, state, and national trends, data, etc.) and then the solution is introduced to the Division of Legislative Services (DLS) for drafting.





# BILLS, BILLS, BILLS.

Bills need sponsor(s)! And this is one of the most essential responsibilities of a Senator or Delegate.

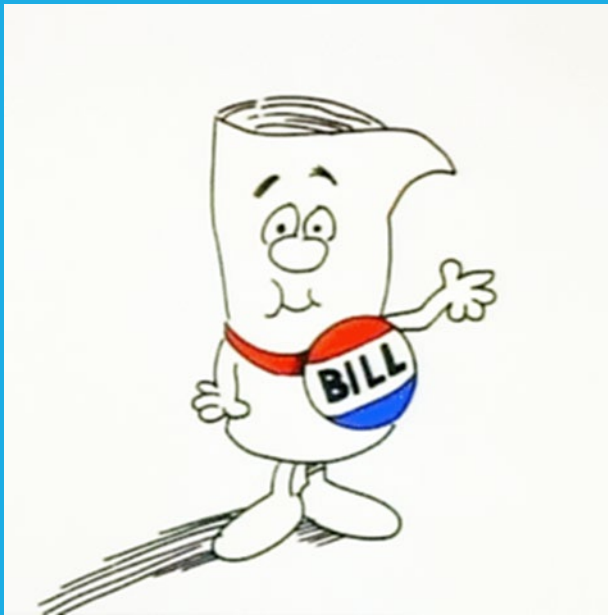
- Helpful to have sponsor in both House and Senate
- Helpful to have cosponsors!

Once the bill is sponsored and drafted by DLS, it's assigned a number in the Legislative Information System (LIS)

- HB XYZ
- SB XYZ

Then it's active on LIS' public system:

<http://lis.virginia.gov>



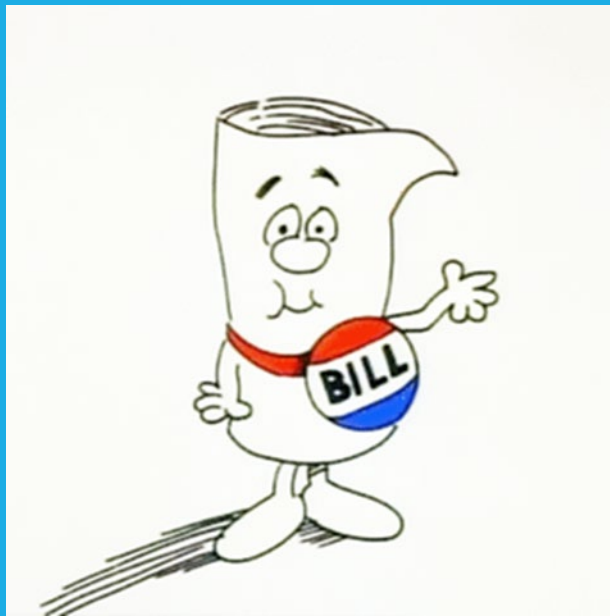
# BILLS, BILLS, BILLS.

## The bill is then assigned to a Committee

- Committees study, debate, and hear comments on bills before voting
- Committee meetings are **open to the public and all bills are made available for comment!**
- Then the bill either **reports (passes)** or it **fails to report (dies)** by way of vote

Once a bill makes it through Committee, it's sent back to the originating body (House or Senate) for a full vote

Then it reports to the opposite chamber **(this is called crossover!)** to go through the exact same process



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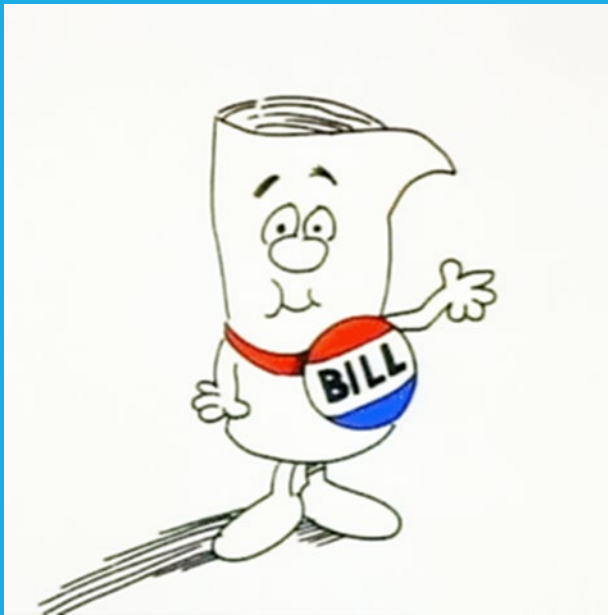
# BILLS, BILLS, BILLS.

Once a bill goes through the Committee process in both the House and Senate, it gets sent to the Governor

The Governor can:

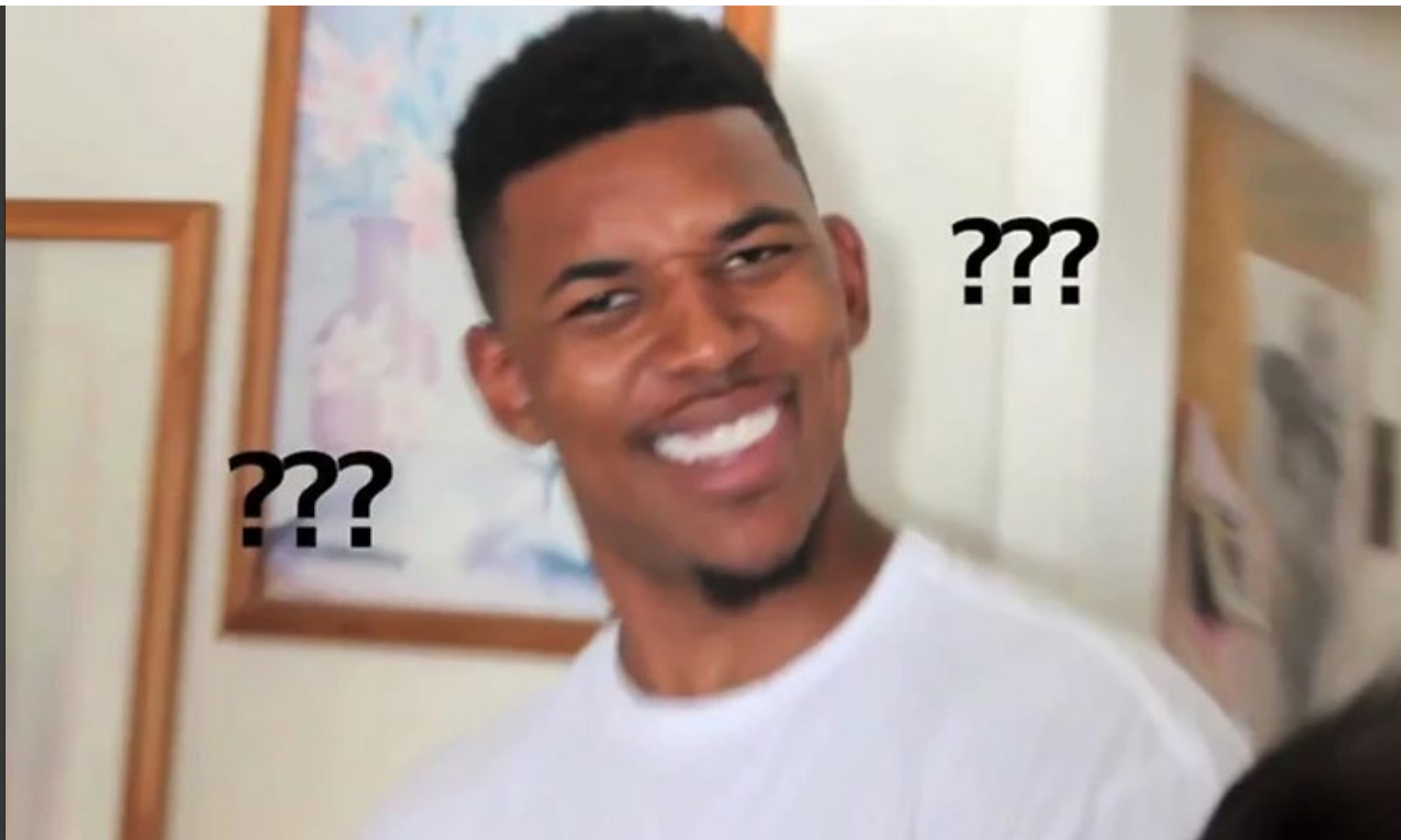
- Amend a bill
- Veto a bill
- Sign/approve a bill

PHEW! Now that the bill has FINALLY made it, it is assigned a chapter number and enacted on July 1<sup>st</sup> of that year



HOW TO STAY  
INFORMED:  
ADVOCATING FOR  
& FOLLOWING  
BILLS

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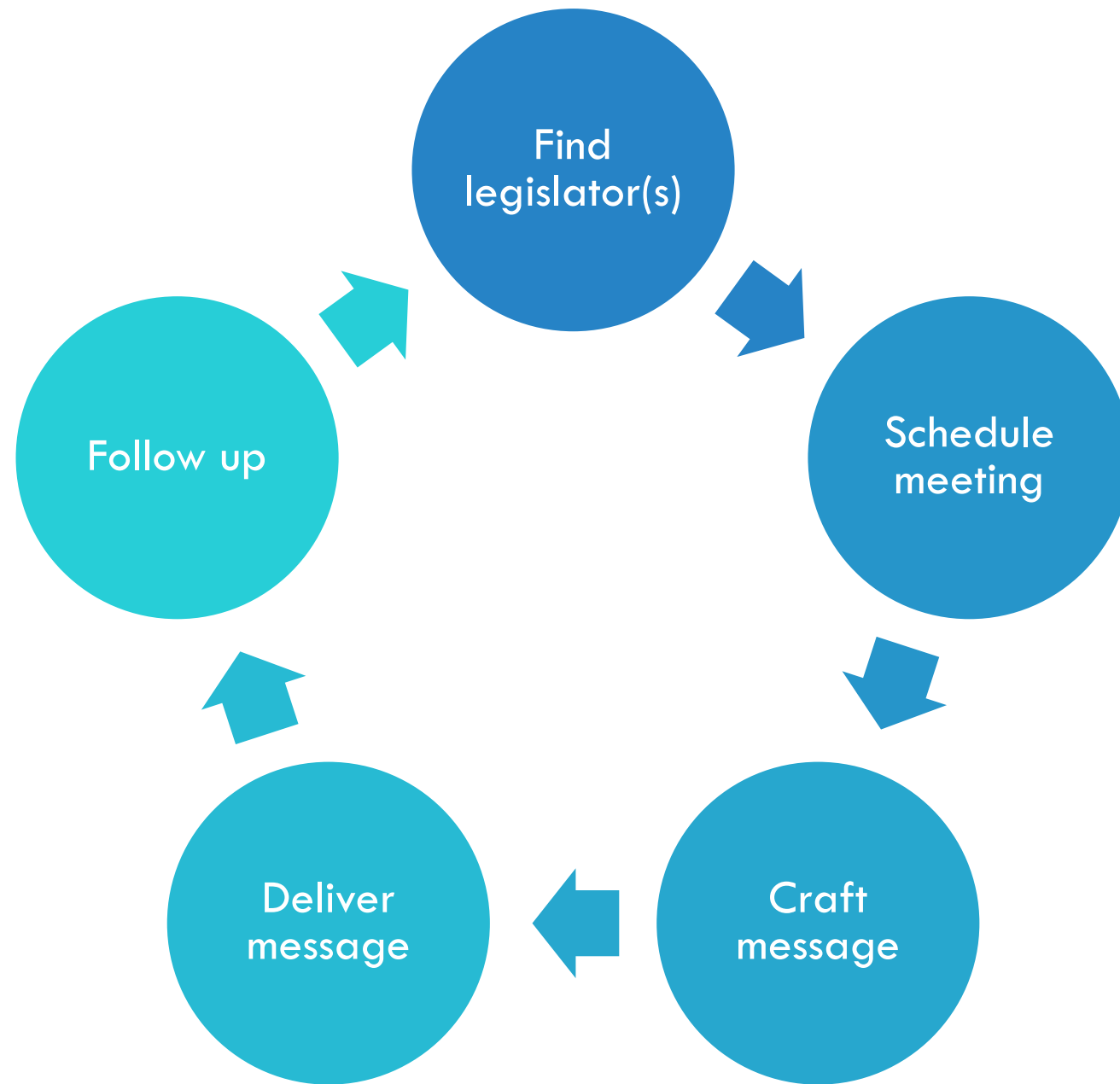


# MAKING CONTACT

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**FIND YOUR LEGISLATOR(S)**

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### STATE DELEGATE

**Betsy B. Carr**

District: 78

Party: D

Capitol Phone: (804) 698-1078

District Phone: (804) 698-1078

[Email](#) | [More Info](#)

[Click to view Boundary](#)

### STATE SENATOR

**Lamont Bagby**

District: 14

Party: D

Capitol Phone: (804) 698-7514

District Phone: (804) 698-7514

[Email](#) | [More Info](#)

[Click to view Boundary](#)

### U.S. CONGRESS

**Jennifer L. McClellan**

District: 4

Party: D

[More Info](#)

[Click to view Boundary](#)

### U.S. SENATOR

**Tim Kaine**

Party: D

[More Info](#)

[Click to view Boundary](#)

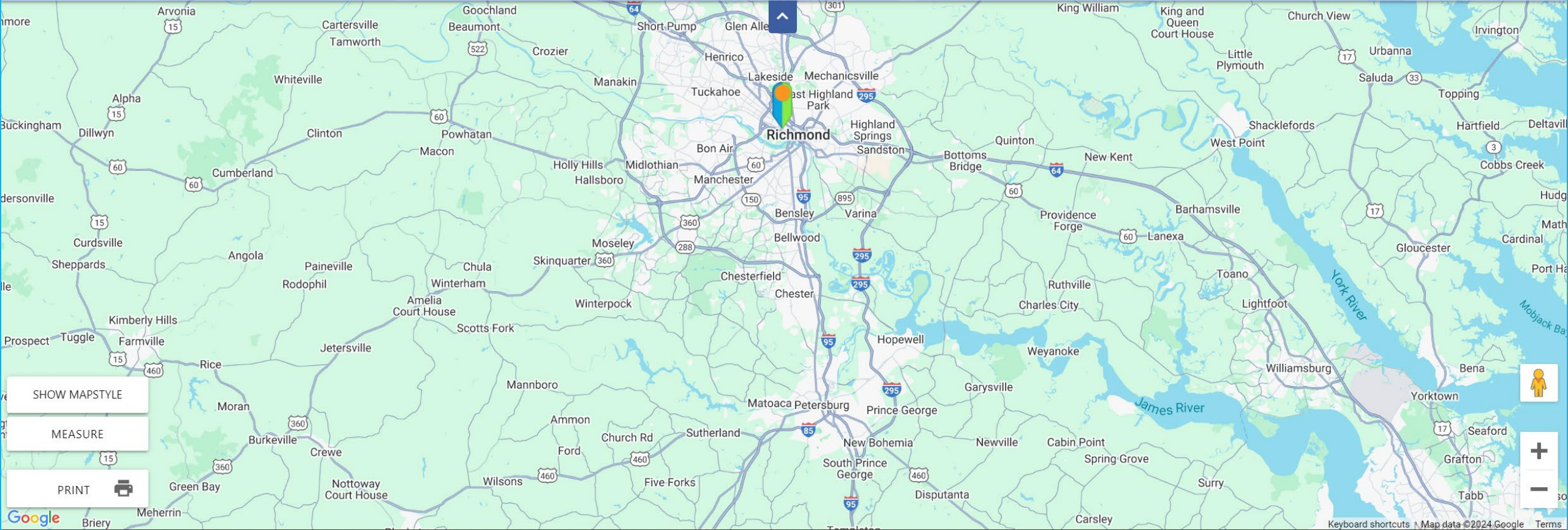
### U.S. SENATOR

**Mark R. Warner**

Party: D

[More Info](#)

[Click to view Boundary](#)



SHOW MAPSTYLE

MEASURE

PRINT





**SCHEDULE A MEETING** |





# SCHEDULE A MEETING

- Reach out early January to get on their calendars!
- When you email and/or call, make sure you mention that you're a constituent. Constituents and/or local agencies in their district are given priority.
- Be ready to tell the scheduler or Legislative Assistant how many will be in the meeting and what the topic of the meeting will be.
- If you're attending the Action Alliance's Day of Action, ask for a meeting on that day.
- It's possible that your legislator won't be available or may have a sudden change in schedule (session is hectic!), it's common and often very helpful to have meetings with the Legislative Assistant – they relay your message to the Senator/Delegate.





PREPARE & CRAFT YOUR MESSAGE



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# PREPARE & CRAFT YOUR MESSAGE

- **Consult** Action Alliance legislative priorities.
- **Make sure your message is clear**, i.e. “We want you to support HB XYZ”. Because meetings can be very brief, it can be helpful to know what you want to say and to ensure you can deliver that message concisely and powerfully.
- **Use your superpower**. How does your work with survivors, families, communities, and/or young people give you a unique perspective on what’s truly needed? You’re the expert.
- You should bring information and materials about your program’s services and stories that demonstrate the impact of your services.
- Bring a business card or contact info.

# FEELING EMPOWERED TO CREATE REAL CHANGE

## Moving from....

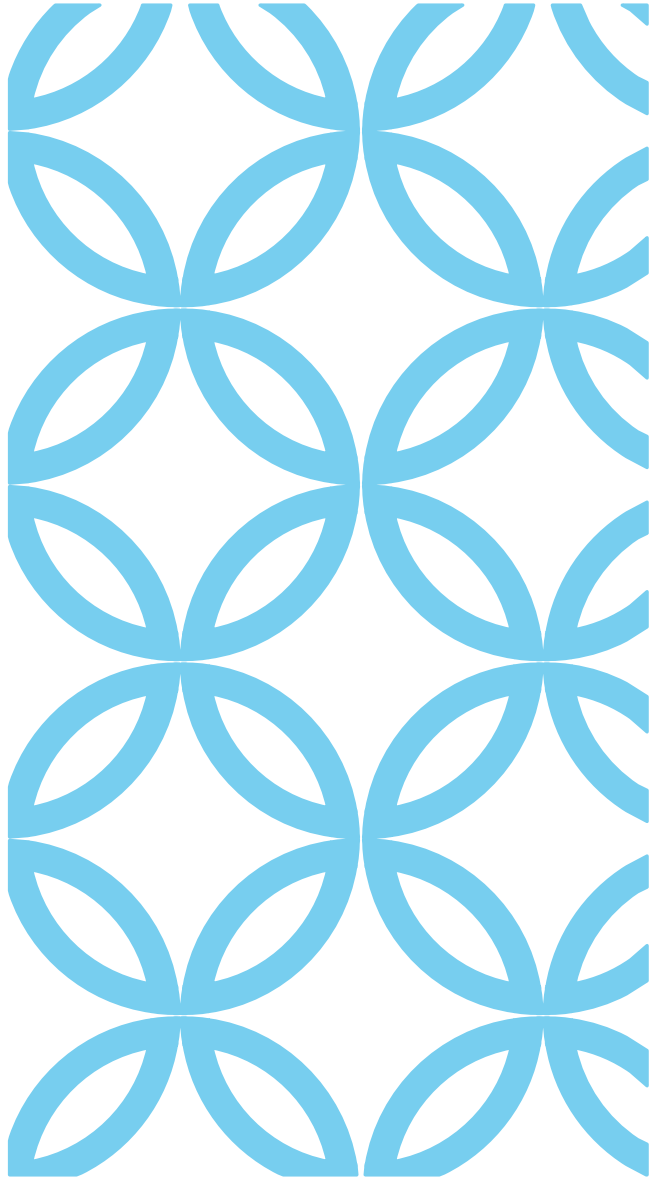
**“I’m not a lawyer” or “I’m not important enough to meet with my legislator”**

**“It feels hopeless to try to convince my legislators to meaningfully invest in anti-oppression work”**

## To.....

**“I have critical insight and expertise about what my community is experiencing and what survivors need – I am an expert on issues that my legislator should understand”**

**“Even if my legislators don’t share my values, they should be accountable to my asks as a constituent and an advocate”**



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**DELIVER YOUR MESSAGE**





# DELIVER YOUR MESSAGE

- **Check in with the member's front desk staff.** If you have business cards, have one ready to hand the staff when you arrive. This helps them announce your arrival.
- **Thank the legislator/staff for meeting with you.**
- **Introduce yourself and your group.** Consider providing a brief description of your program.
- **Remember to use your superpower.**
- **Make an ask (or asks).**
- **Be prepared to answer any questions** and know, it's okay to say "Can I get back to you about that?"
- **Thank them for their time** and for their commitment to these important issues.



# FOLLOW UP

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## FOLLOW UP

- Reinforce your original message/ask(s)!
- Thank them for the conversation and ask that they continue to support survivors by acting on the bills/topic you discussed.
- You can always follow up via public forum like Facebook or Twitter. A message via social media may be particularly impactful.
- Feel free to ask for more information on out-of-session town halls or district office hours being held by the legislator.



WHAT'S NEXT?

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# IDEAS FOR THE OTHER 364 DAYS

- **Host** a letter writing party at your agency or with your friends/family!
- **Propose** your own bill.
- **Stay persistent** on the issues impacting your community.
- **Attend** Townhall meetings or District Office Hours.
- **VOTE!** And encourage survivors, volunteers, staff, partners, and allies to check their voting eligibility/status and to have a plan for hitting the polls.



BUILDING **thriving**  
COMMUNITIES

**civic engagement  
toolkit**







For more information on the Action Alliance's Public Policy work, including educational tools and ways use your voice for change, please visit

[www.vsdvalliance.org](http://www.vsdvalliance.org)

imagine a

radically

hopeful

future

and take action  
to make it happen





**SEE YOU SOON!**  
ANNUAL DAY OF ACTION