



# North Dakota Catholic Conference Legislative Action Network Guide

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1-888-419-1237 ❖ 701-223-2519 ❖ [ndcatholic.org](http://ndcatholic.org) ❖ [ndcatholic@btinet.net](mailto:ndcatholic@btinet.net)

## The North Dakota Legislature

The North Dakota Legislative Assembly consists of a **Senate** with 47 senators and a **House of Representatives** with 94 representatives. The Legislative Assembly regular session usually convenes the first week of January of an odd-numbered year.

**Standing committees** in each chamber handle most of the daily work of the legislature. They hold hearings, consider amendments, discuss the bills, and make recommendations to the full chamber. These committees are formed by subject matter, such as the Senate Judiciary Committee and the House Human Services Committee.

The **appropriation committees** are also important. They review every spending bill and most bills that have a fiscal impact. Even if a bill gets a favorable recommendation from a committee, an appropriations committee could reduce the funding or not give the bill a favorable recommendation.

By the thirty-fourth day, the chambers must vote on every bill. Bills that pass, “**crossover**” to the other chamber. The whole process then repeats itself in the second chamber.

If the second chamber defeats a bill, the bill is dead. If it amends and passes the bill, the legislation is sent, with its amendments, back to the first chamber. That chamber can either **concur or not concur** with the changes. If it does not concur, a **conference committee** is appointed with members from both chambers to try to work out the differences.

## Participating in the Legislative Process

Participation in the legislative process is as important way to exercise their political responsibility as Christians.

### To Become Informed:

- Read the newspaper and listen to radio and television news
- Attend candidate forums
- Discuss subjects with family, friends, neighbors, and clergy
- Look for websites on the issue (ndcatholic.org has information on issues of concern to the Catholic Church)
- Get the North Dakota Catholic Conference E-Newsletter (sign up at ndcatholic.org)
- Attend legislative hearings and floor sessions

### To Make a Difference:

- Join the Legislative Action Network
- Testify at the legislature
- E-mail, call, or write your legislators
- Talk to your legislators during their visits home

### Did You Know?

**In North Dakota, every bill introduced gets a committee hearing *and* a vote by the full Senate or House. In other words, committees cannot hold or “kill” bills. They can only make recommendations.**

**This is one feature that makes the North Dakota legislature a “citizens” legislature.**

# HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW



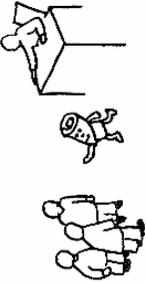
1. After the preliminary business of opening a session, the presiding officer (the Lieutenant Governor in the Senate and the Speaker in the House) calls for an introduction of bills.



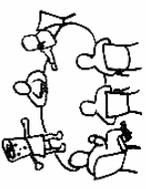
2. Any legislator may hand the legislator's bill to the bill clerk. Bills are usually prepared by the Legislative Council for introduction by a legislator. If a bill is not prepared by the Legislative Council, it must be reviewed by the Legislative Council office for proper form and style.



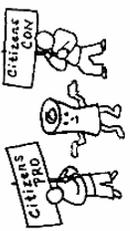
3. The bill clerk assigns a number to the bill and the Chief Clerk of the House or the Secretary of the Senate reads the bill by title only. (This is called the first reading of the bill.)



4. The presiding officer refers the bill to the proper committee.



5. In committee the bill is read and discussed.



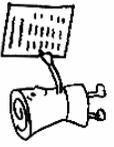
6. Public hearings are held on every bill.



7. The full committee may (a) report the bill unfavorably with or without amendment, (b) report it favorably with or without amendment, (c) report it without any recommendation and with or without amendment, (d) request its referral to another committee with or without any amendment.



8. Each committee reports to the House or Senate on the bills which have been referred to it. All bills, regardless of type of committee report, will be placed on the calendar for final passage.



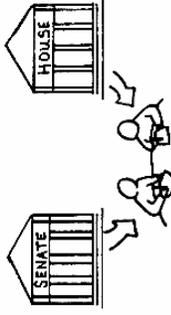
9. If the committee recommends an amendment, the amendment is placed on the calendar and adopted or rejected prior to the bill itself being placed on the calendar.



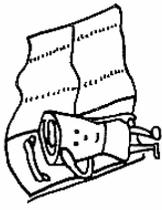
10. When a bill comes up on the calendar, it is read again. This is known as the second reading and is the time when the bill can be finally passed or killed. Then the bill is debated on the floor of the House or Senate.



11. The bill is then (a) defeated, (b) passed. If passed, the bill is delivered (messengered) to the other house.



12. If second house passes the bill in the same form, it is enrolled, signed by presiding officers, and sent to the Governor. If the second house passes the bill in a different form (amends the bill), it is sent back to the first house for concurrence. If the first house does not concur, the presiding officers of both house appoint a conference committee.



13. This conference committee makes recommendations to both houses and both houses must approve the bill in the same form. The bill is then enrolled, signed by the presiding officers, and sent to the Governor. If signed or if forwarded to the Secretary of State without being signed, it becomes law (usually on August 1).



14. If vetoed, it can still become a law by a 2/3 vote of both houses.



15. A bill, once passed, may be repealed, wholly or in part, through a vote of the electorate, a referendum.



16. A law may also be proposed and acted upon by the electorate means of an initiated measure.

## Testifying Before a Legislative Committee

All citizens have the **right to testify** before the North Dakota Legislative Assembly on any bill or resolution.

North Dakota has one of the most open legislatures in the nation. Every bill must have a public hearing, must be publicly voted upon by the committee, and then must come before the full House or Senate for still another public vote. **Your opportunity to testify on a bill comes at the committee hearing.**

Legislative committees meet in rooms on the ground floor or in the legislative wing of the State Capitol. **You can come into a committee meeting at any time, even if the door is closed or a hearing is in progress.**

Lists of the legislative committees, committee members, and the days and places committees meet are available at the Legislative Information Kiosk in the hall between the Senate and House chambers.

You can find out which committee will hear the bill in which you are interested by calling the toll-free number and asking for information or inquiring in-person at the Legislative Information Kiosk. Also, most of the state's daily newspapers carry listings of all the bills that are introduced and of scheduled committee hearings.

In addition to checking with the Legislative Information Kiosk, TV monitors on the kiosk and in the hall of the ground floor of the Capitol display what bills are being heard by what committees.

### Before the Hearing You Should...

Find out when and where your bill will be heard. **Be on time for the hearing.** Usually, once a hearing is closed on a particular bill, no further testimony is heard. Plan your testimony. Although not necessary, it is helpful to have written copies of your comments available. See if other persons will be testifying on your bill. If so, try to **coordinate your testimony before the hearing to avoid duplication.**

### At the Hearing . . .

All persons usually get a chance to speak, **but sometimes, because of large turnouts, it is not possible to give everyone a chance to speak.** If you do not get a chance to testify, your presence may be acknowledged and you might be asked if you favor or oppose the bill. And, you can always submit written testimony.

Even if you do not testify, sign the witness sheet at the lectern. Give the bill number, whether you favor or oppose the bill, and your name.

The chairman will announce the beginning of the hearing on a particular bill. The first speaker is usually the bill's sponsor. The chairman then asks for testimony, first from proponents and then opponents. Wait your turn.

Plan on following the custom (**although it is not absolutely necessary**) of beginning your remarks by addressing the chairman and committee members, giving your name and address, and why you are there. For example: "Mr. or Madam Chairman, and members of the committee, my name is John Q. Public from Edwinton. I'm in favor of this bill because, etc."

Be brief. Do not repeat what others have said. The hearings are informal, so be conversational. Avoid being too technical. Avoid using acronyms or technical references unless you first explain what they mean.

Do not be nervous, or worried about doing something wrong. **There are no "rights and wrongs" about testifying.** Legislators are just your friends and neighbors who want to hear what you have to say.

Expect some questions and comments from committee members. These questions are not designed to embarrass you, but merely to get additional information.

Stay informed at [ndcatholic.org](http://ndcatholic.org)!

# Sample Legislative Action Alert

## Description of Bill

Be sure to read this when passing on the information.

## When

Look here to see how best to respond and if there is time for bulletin announcement.

## Where

Remember: Either chamber could be considering the bill.

Also: there are **two** House representatives and **one** senator.

## Who are your legislators?

If you are not sure, call the Legislative Hotline (1-888-635-3447) or the North Dakota Catholic Conference (1-888-419-1237.)

## Action Alert From the North Dakota Catholic Conference

### Tell Representatives to Vote Yes on HB 5555 -- the Go Fly a Kite Bill

House Bill 5555 would make April "Kite Month" in North Dakota. Show your support for kite flying and urge your representatives to vote "Yes" on HB 5555.

Message: Please vote "Yes" on HB 5555, to make April "Kite Month" in North Dakota.

When: **Immediately.** The House could vote on the measure before next week.

Where: North Dakota House of Representatives

Legislative Hotline 1-888-635-3447 --- Bismarck 328-3373

Hearing Impaired: 1-800-366-6888

E-mail addresses can be found at the Legislative Council Site at: <http://www.state.nd.us/lr/>

For more information on HB 5555:

- Go to [ndcatholic.org](http://ndcatholic.org)
- Wings on Strings Kite Club

*This action alert was distributed by the North Dakota Catholic Conference; 103 South Third Street, Suite 10, Bismarck, ND 58501; 701-223-2519; 1-888-419-1237.*  
[ndcatholic.org](http://ndcatholic.org)

## More Information

Some issues are complicated. The ND Catholic Conference Web Site may have more information on a bill or issue. If you have a question, call the North Dakota Catholic Conference.

## Bill Number

House Bills begin with "HB." Senate Bills begin with "SB"

## Message for Legislator

This is an example. Try to use your own words, but keep it short.

Be sure to say whether you want the legislator to vote "Yes" or "No" on the bill.

## How

Both phone calls and e-mails are free!

## Find Out How Your Legislator Voted

**Step One:** Find out the bill number of the bill. If you are not sure, but know the subject matter, look at the major topic index at the legislature web site ([www.legis.nd.gov](http://www.legis.nd.gov))

### Version or Action Inquiry

Enter the four-digit number of the measure in the appropriate place to take you to the list of versions of the measure or to the list of legislative actions on the measure.

House Bills = 1xxx

House Concurrent Resolutions = 3xxx

House Resolutions = 5xxx

House Memorial Resolution = 7001

Senate Bills = 2xxx

Senate Concurrent Resolutions = 4xxx

Senate Resolutions = 6xxx

Senate Memorial Resolution = 8001

Bill Version List:

Bill Status Actions:

**Step Two:** If you know the bill number, go to the **Version or Action Inquiry** page. Type in the bill number after "Bill Status Actions" and click "Go."

**Step Three:** A list of Measure Actions will come up. The list of actions on the left side. On the right side is a list of journal entries. Find out whether the chamber voted on the bill and find the corresponding journal link on the right side.



**Step Four:** Click on the journal link and your web browser will either open or download a pdf file of the day's journal. The journal contains **all** the day's actions, so you will have to search the journal for the roll call vote on that bill.

### ROLL CALL

The question being on the final passage of the amended bill, which has been read, the roll was

called and there were 29 YEAS, 16 NAYS, 0 EXCUSED, 2 ABSENT AND NOT VOTING.

**YEAS:** Andrist; Bowman; Christmann; Cook; Dever; Erbele; Fischer; Flakoll; Freborg; Heckaman; Kilzer; Klein; Krauter; Lee, G.; Lindaas; Lyson; Marcellais; Mathern; Nething; O'Connell; Oehlke; Olafson; Robinson; Stenehjem; Taylor; Tollefson; Urlacher; Wanzek; Wardner

**NAYS:** Anderson; Bakke; Fiebiger; Grindberg; Hacker; Heitkamp; Holmberg; Horne; Krebsbach; Lee, J.; Nelson; Pomeroy; Potter; Seymour; Triplett; Warner

**ABSENT AND NOT VOTING:** Behm; Tallackson

HB 1466, as amended, passed and the title was agreed to.

**Step Five:** Contact your legislator. If you agree with the vote, thank him or her. If you disagree, politely tell him or her why and ask that he or she reconsider if the subject comes up again.

## **The North Dakota Catholic Conference**

The North Dakota Catholic Conference is the voice of the Roman Catholic Bishops of North Dakota on public policy matters. It addresses matters affecting the life and dignity of human persons, the family, religious liberty, the poor, and the common good, as well as those policies impacting the church's public ministry in health care, education, and social services. To help others shape a public policy consistent with the Gospel message, the North Dakota Catholic Conference provides:

- A web site with information on bills, legislative alerts, testimony, and legislative updates
- An e-newsletter with up-to-date information on legislative developments
- A Legislative Action Network, working with parishes and volunteers, through which people can make their voice heard

For more information, contact the North Dakota Catholic Conference at 1-888-419-1237 or look at our website at: **<http://ndcatholic.org>**. You can also e-mail the conference at: **[ndcatholic@btinet.net](mailto:ndcatholic@btinet.net)**.