

ORAL HEALTH ADVOCACY TOOLKIT



ORAL HEALTH KANSAS
ADVOCACY • PUBLIC AWARENESS • EDUCATION



Welcome

Oral Health Kansas would like to welcome you to our Advocacy Toolkit. This toolkit was created for the use of Oral Health Advocates wishing to make a difference in the lives of Kansans through oral health policy change and development. Although this toolkit was created for beginners, more seasoned Oral Health Advocates may also find information or tips on legislative engagement that will benefit their efforts. We applaud you for taking initiative in developing your advocacy skills, and for caring about how legislation affects the oral health and the lives of every person in Kansas.

What is advocacy?

Before we begin discussing ways to advocate for oral health, it is first important to discuss what advocacy means, why it is important, and who is involved. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines advocacy as, “the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal”. In other words, advocacy is actions taken to support something you believe in. Often the word advocacy is linked to politics, and in this toolkit we discuss strategies on building meaningful relationships with politicians, but advocacy can be more than politics and so called “elbow-rubbing”. Advocacy is about standing up for a cause you believe in, or a change you would like to see manifest because you know it would lead to the betterment of lives. As Oral Health Advocates, we know that oral health plays a pivotal role in the overall health of an individual, and we can be certain that policies that help increase access to oral health care is something worthy of creating awareness for.

Why is advocacy important?

Advocacy is important because it can generate awareness of important topics that have the potential to improve quality of life. Whether we like it or not, policies effect almost every aspect of our daily lives. From the guidelines resulting in the cleanliness of our water, to the speed limit we drive on the highway, to the range of actions we are allowed to take at our jobs, all of these are regulated by laws. If we aren't taking action to influence these decisions, then these decisions may be made for us. Wouldn't you rather have a say?

Who can be involved in advocacy?

Anyone can become an Oral Health Advocate, and there are many ways that advocating for oral health can be achieved. Oral Health Kansas invites persons with diverse backgrounds and professions to become oral health champions, as viewpoints from different stakeholders can result in stronger policies, and connections with different stakeholders may help drive policies affecting oral health into fruition. We hope this toolkit can be a guide for you in taking a larger role in advocating for policies that will improve the oral health for Kansans!

Legislative Process in Kansas: The Journey of a Bill

Understanding the steps in which a bill goes through to turn into a law is important in the world of advocacy, because this is how ideas about policy turn into realizations. On the next page you will find a flow chart to help visualize the routes in which a bill can take to become a law.

STEP 1

A bill must be introduced in either the House of Representatives or the Senate. Introductions can be made by individual legislators, legislators who are joint-supporting a bill, or entire committees.

STEP 2

The bill will be assigned a legislative committee where the members can decide to have a hearing for the bill where proponents and opponents may speak or write testimonies in favor or against the bill. Deliberation by the committee takes place next, and if all goes well the bill will be approved, although it may or may not have amendments made.

STEP 3

After approval by the committee, the bill will be sent back to its House of Origin (either the House of Representatives or the Senate) to once again be deliberated and approved by what is called the Committee of the Whole. Amendments may also be made at this time.

STEP 4

The bill must undergo one more vote, or the Final Passage, in its House of Origin. It is then sent to the Second House. For example, if the bill passed in the House of Representatives, it is then sent to the Senate, and vice versa for bills passed in the Senate.

STEP 5

The first four steps that were completed in the House of Origin must now be completed in the Second House. From here, different scenarios may take place depending on whether the second house makes amendments to the bill.

STEP 6

Scenario A: The Second House passes the bill without making amendments.
Scenario B: The Second House makes amendments to the bill and is sent back to the House of Origin. If the House of Origin concurs with the amendments made, the bill is ready for the next step. If the House of Origin does not concur, they will request a conference committee. Both houses can then choose to adopt the conference committee's report.

STEP 7

The bill is sent to the Governor. From this step, a few more scenarios of making the bill into a law could take place.

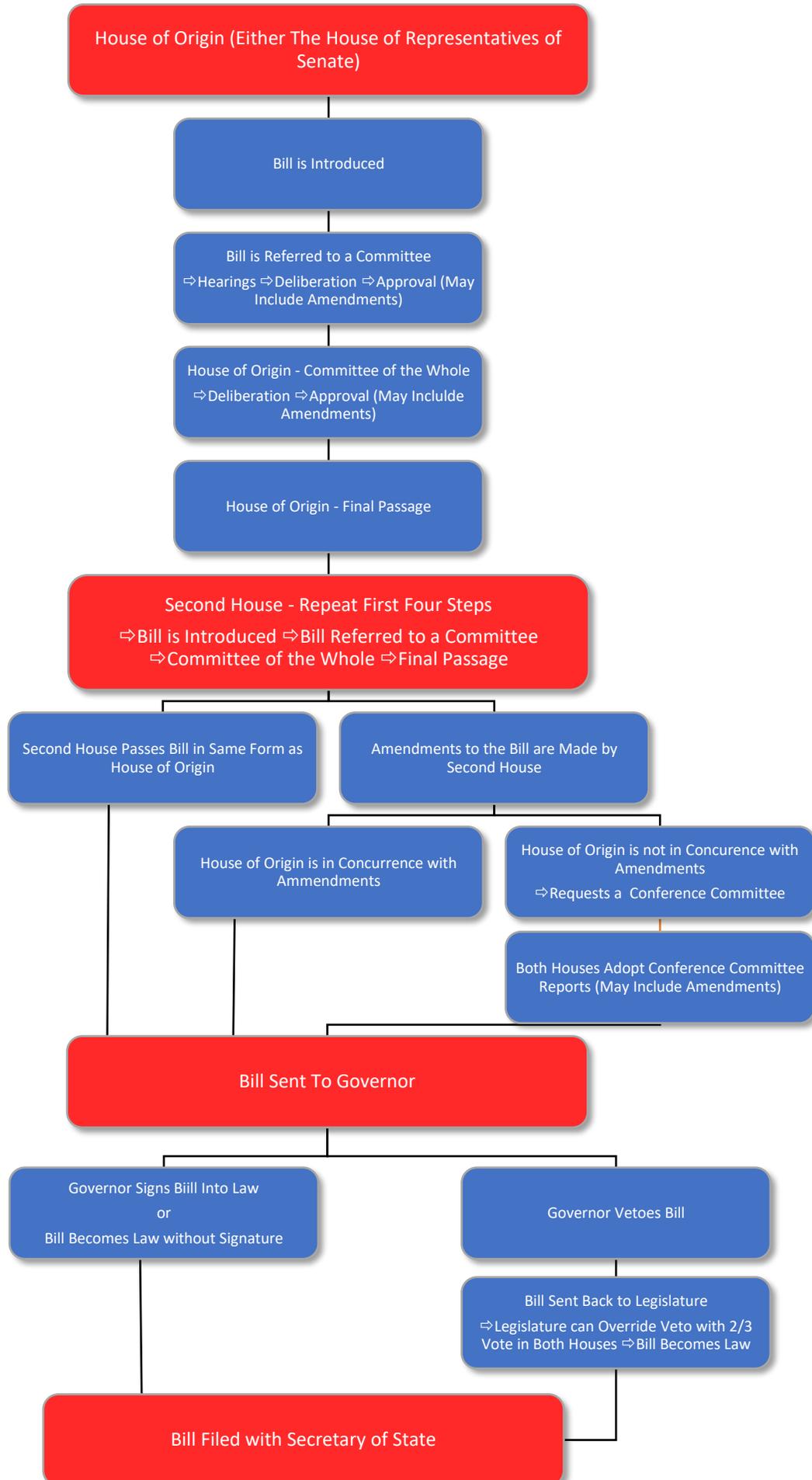
STEP 8

Scenario A: The Governor can sign the bill into law, or the bill may become law without the Governor's signature if it is not signed within 10 days.
Scenario B: The Governor vetoes the bill, which is sent back to the houses and the veto is overruled by a 2/3 vote in each house. The bill then becomes a law.

STEP 9

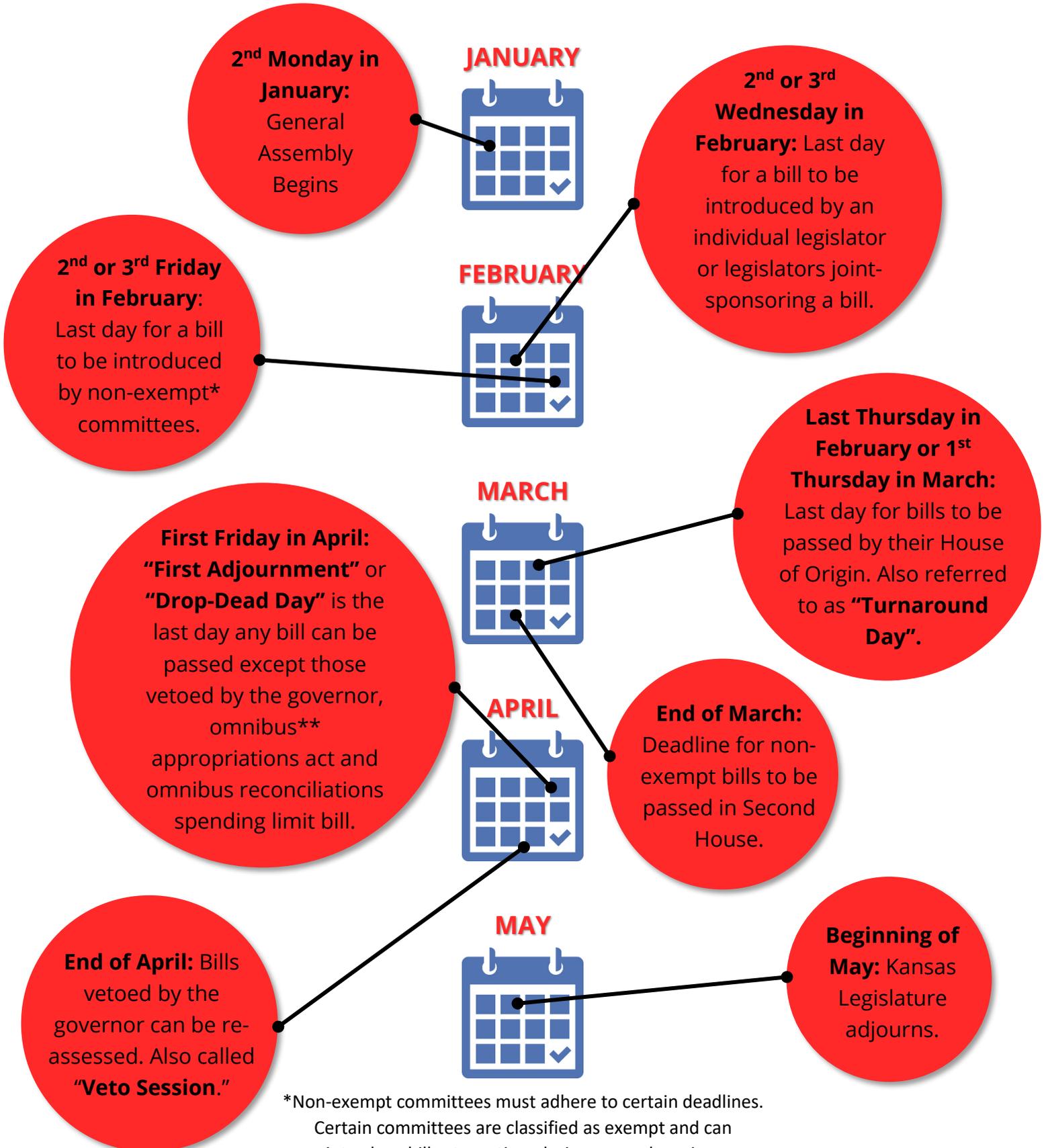
The law is then filed by the Secretary of State.

How a Bill Becomes a Law



Kansas Legislative Time Line

Advocacy can take place year-round, but a majority of the legislative action in turning a bill into a law takes place during the months of January to May. The deadlines for each step of the law-making process change each year, but the general timeline can be found in the table below:



*Non-exempt committees must adhere to certain deadlines.

Certain committees are classified as exempt and can introduce bills at any time during general session.

**Omnibus is when different smaller legislative items are packaged into one bill.

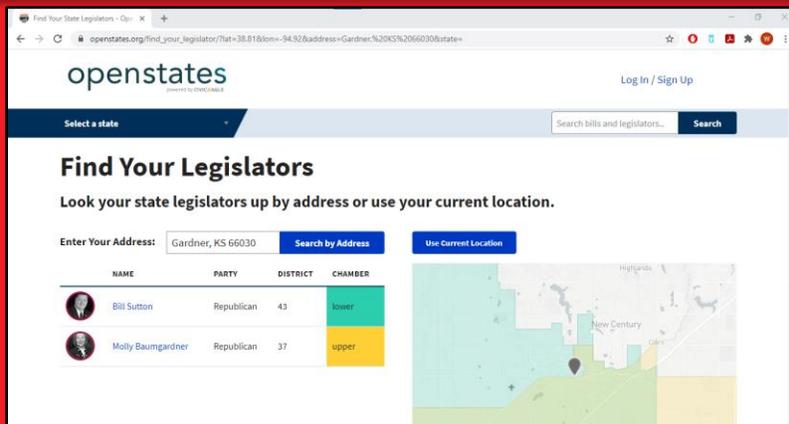
How to Find Your Legislators

In the Kansas Legislature, there are 125 members in the House of Representatives and 40 members in the Senate, each of which reside over a certain area of Kansas. A resident of the area that the legislator has been elected for is called a constituent. Typically, during advocacy activities, a constituent will contact their own legislators. To find out who your legislators are, follow the steps below:

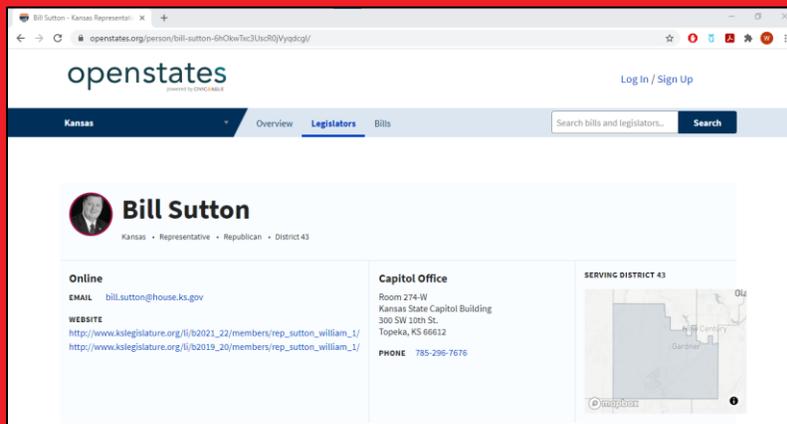
STEP 1. First go to the website openstates.org. You will come to a webpage that looks like this:



STEP 2. Go ahead and enter your physical address under where it says "Find Your Legislators". Click search. The names of your legislators should appear on the page and look similar to the website pictured below:



STEP 3. You can now click on the names of you legislator to pull up their information. On this page it will show if they are a Representative or a Senator, their political party affiliation, their contact information, and a website link that will take you to their page on the Kansas Legislative website.



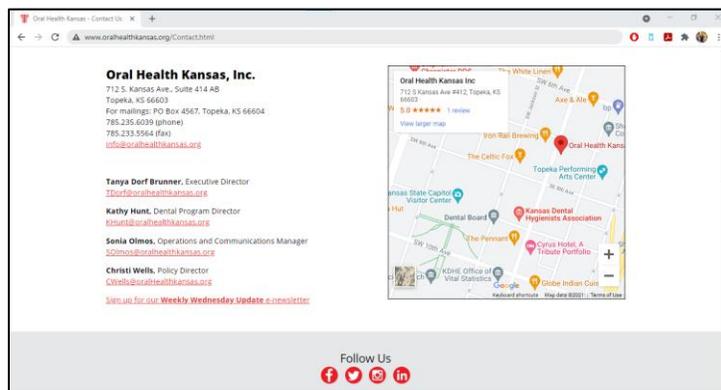
STEP 4. For even more information about your legislator, click on their Kansas Legislative website link. This page will show you what committees your legislator is a part of, what bills they have sponsored, and may provide a bit more personal background.



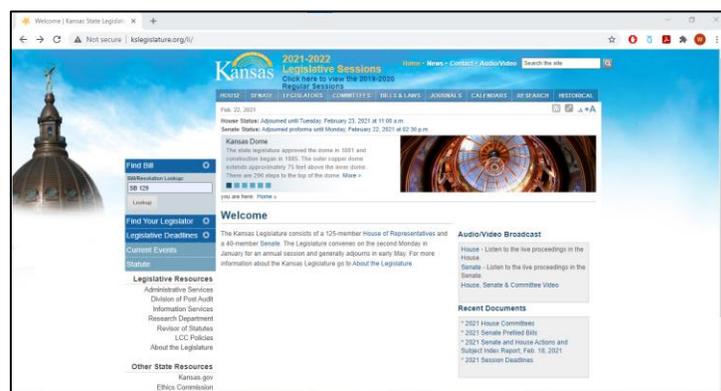
Staying Updated on Current Legislation

To more effectively advocate for a bill, it can be important to know at what stage in the legislative life-cycle your bill is at. Below you will find the steps on finding the current status of a bill:

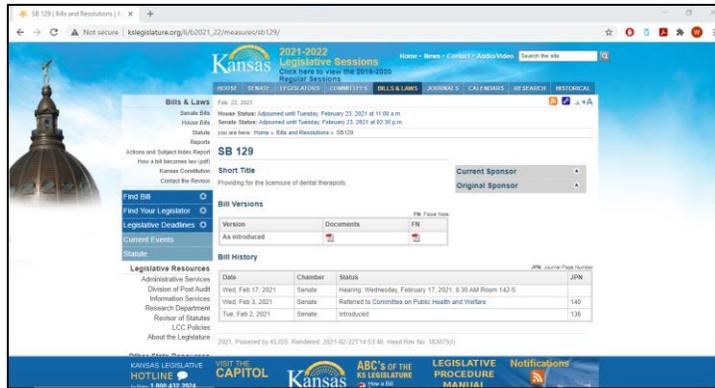
STEP 1. First you will need to know the number assigned to your bill. A bill's number is assigned when it is introduced at the beginning of the legislative session. A good way to find your bill's number, is to contact Oral Health Kansas, or another non-profit organization that advocates for or against the bill you are interested in.



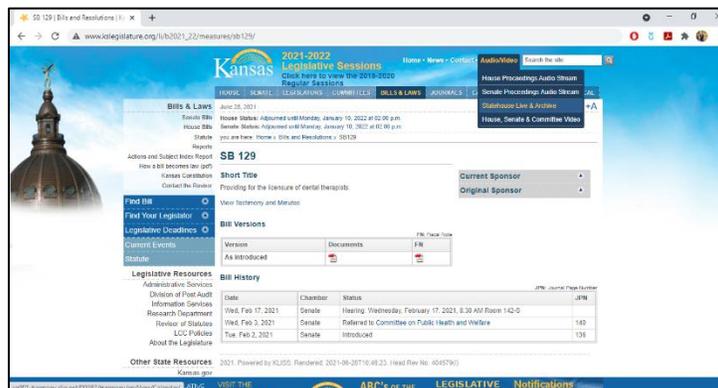
STEP 2. Go to kslegislative.org. In the column on the left-hand side of the page, you will see a tab that reads "Find Bill". Click on the down arrow and type in the bill's assigned number. Then press "Lookup".



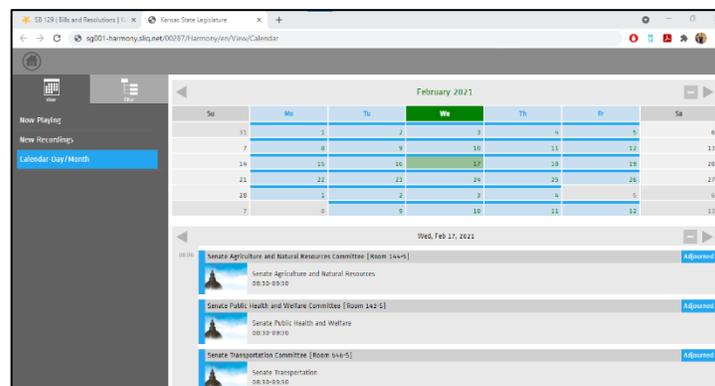
STEP 3. This will provide you with a link to the proposed bill and show you the history and current status of the bill.



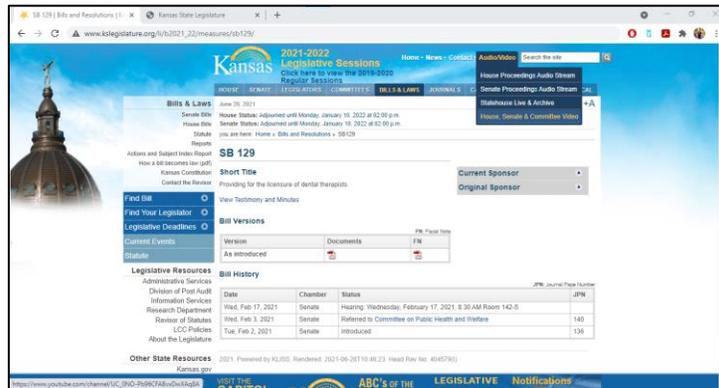
PRO TIP 1. If your bill has had or is scheduled for a hearing, you can listen to the hearing by going to the top right-hand side of the page where it says “Audio/Video”. Scroll over the words with your mouse and a menu of options will appear below. Click on the third option, “State House Live and Archive”.



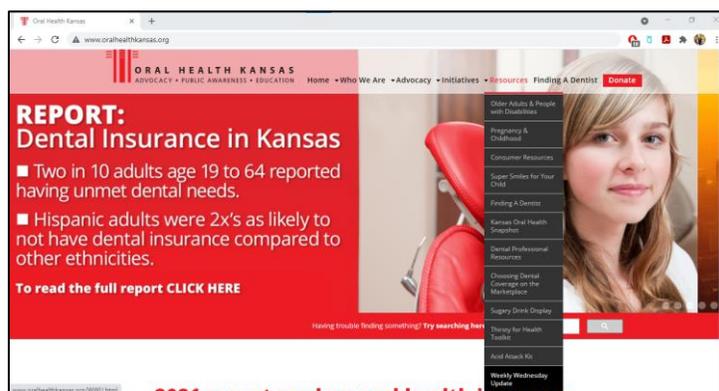
This will take you to a calendar that shows all the hearings scheduled. You can listen to hearings live at their scheduled time, or you can listen to them at a later date by going back on the calendar and finding the date and time of the hearing.



PRO TIP 2. The Kansas Legislature also has a YouTube Channel. This can be found by going back to the Kansas Legislature’s website, scrolling over Audio/Video at the top right-hand side of the screen, and clicking on the fourth option listed: House, Senate & Committee Video.



PRO TIP 3. Another great way to follow legislation that affects oral health is to subscribe to Oral Health Kansas’s Weekly Wednesday Updates where we provide information on issues that are important to oral health advocates. To sign up, go to our website, www.oralhealthkansas.org. Scroll over the Resources tab found at the top of the page. Click where it says “Weekly Wednesday Updates” at the bottom of the menu.



Scroll down and you will see a prompt that says “Click here to sign up for Weekly Wednesday Updates”.

Developing Your Message: Talking Points

When advocating for a certain policy, it is important to have concise talking points. People, especially legislators, tend to be very busy and there may be only a limited amount of time available for you to hook the attention of the person you are trying to make aware of your policy topic. Talking points should highlight imperative details of your policy, the current state of the issue, and how the policy will affect constituents.

If your policy change is being supported by an organization with a lobbyist, they may already have a list of talking points, or can help you develop some. If not, a good resource to use for developing talking points related to oral health policies was created by the FrameWorks Institute and can be found by going to

<https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/publication/annotated-talking-points/>

Enhancing Oral Health: A Communications Toolkit

FRAMEWORKS

FRAMING STRATEGY
Annotated Talking Points

- Oral health is inextricably linked to overall health.
- It affects physical and mental health.
 - People with poor oral health face higher risk of cardiovascular disease, stroke, complications in pregnancy and childbirth, and other conditions.
- People with visible signs of oral disease are negatively judged and socially stigmatized, which affects mental health and wellbeing.
- And it affects social outcomes too.
 - People with untreated dental problems, for example, often have difficulty finding jobs, which lowers employment.
- Oral health affects our entire society.
 - Poor oral health translates into lost earning potential, which decreases tax revenues and economic activity.
 - And it leads to increased health care costs borne by society.
- We need to support oral health for all people. But how?

These talking points open by expanding the scope of oral health beyond the teeth and gums.

Explanation and detail show how oral health affects overall health.

Framing Strategy: Annotated Talking Points | 11

Basic Ways to Advocate

Now that we know a little more about the legislative process, how to find our legislators, what part of the process our bill is at, and the key talking points for our bill, we are ready to participate in some advocacy activities!

SENDING AN EMAIL

The first advocacy activity we will talk about is sending an e-mail to your legislator. Here is a simple template for how your e-mail could be formatted:

Dear Senator/Representative <Last Name of Legislator>,

My name is <Your Name> and I am your constituent from <Your City>, Kansas. I am writing to you today in order to ask for your support with <Bill Name or Number>. <Talking Point 1>. <Talking point 2>. <Talking Point 3>.

<Personal Story>.

If you have any further questions about <Bill Name or Number> please don't hesitate to ask. I would be happy to provide any further information you need. Thank you for your time and your dedication to helping improve oral health for Kansans!

Sincerely,

<Your Name>

<Your Address>

<Phone Number>

<E-mail Address>

When writing an e-mail, or contacting a legislator in any way, it is important to have a personal story of how you or people you know have or are currently suffering from lack of oral health care. Adding a face and story to a policy is powerful in the world of advocacy.

MAKING A PHONE CALL

Making a phone call to a legislator is similar to writing an e-mail, in that you want to introduce yourself and tell them you are their constituent, tell them why you are calling (whether supporting or not supporting a bill), bring up your talking points, and also add in your personal story.



One difference about making a phone call is that your legislator may have questions for you while you are on the call. It is awesome to be able to give your legislator more information about your bill, but if you are unsure of the answer to one of his/her questions, don't feel you need to make something up. Reply that you are unsure of an answer at this time, but can get back to them at a later time with the answer. Honesty is key, and this gives you a chance to bring up the topic of your bill again at a later date.

Conversational Etiquette – Quick Tips!

- ✓ Always address your legislator by their title, either Senator or Representative followed by their last name. An example would be: Senator Smith.
- ✓ Be polite and professional. Legislators will respond and be more apt to listen to your concerns if you are courteous and respectful.
- ✓ Listen to your legislator when they voice their opinion on an issue, and don't interrupt them when they are speaking.
- ✓ Be firm in your stance on the issue, but also considerate of their views if they differ, and tactful in your responses.
- ✓ Say "Thank you" at the end of any conversation you have with your legislator, and leave them with your contact information.

MEET WITH YOUR LEGISLATOR

Relationships are key in producing policy change, and a great way to develop relationships with your legislators is to plan a visit with them. The following steps will prepare you for meeting with your legislator:

Step 1: Schedule Your Visit

You can schedule a visit with the legislator by calling their office or emailing them. When contacting your legislator's office, make sure to include your name, your background information such as any relevant organization you belong to or profession, the topic you would like to speak to them about, and your availability. In situations when in-person visits are not possible, an alternative is to schedule a meeting via Zoom or another video meeting platform. If this method of meeting is preferable, you may mention this when scheduling your visit.

Contact information for Kansas legislators can be found at <http://www.kslegislature.org/li/> by clicking on the "Find Your Legislator" tab in the column on the left side of the page. Once the pop-down column appears, type in the name of your legislator and click the "Find Legislator" button.

Step 2: Prepare for Your Visit

Before meeting your legislator, there are a few things you'll want to do to prepare. Make sure you organize a presentation and practice your talking points. Most likely you'll only have 5-15 minutes to visit with your legislator, so keep your presentation rather brief. Along with your talking points, try to also add in personal stories about how the issue or policy has or will affect you or other constituents.

If going with a group, make sure you have organized with them who will be in charge of discussing each talking point. Generally, it is best if you limit group sizes to 2-4 people.

Don't forget to print materials with information about the policy issue you are discussing to give to your legislator at the meeting. It is important they

have something to take with them to remind them later on of the issue and main points discussed.

Researching your legislator to see what bills they have and have not supported is also something you can do to prepare. Knowing their voting history can be used to drive points or build rapport.

Prepare what you will wear at your visit. First impressions are very important and dress should be business casual.

Step 3: Meet with Your Legislator

On the day of your meeting, make sure to show up at least 15 minutes early, but be prepared to be flexible, as legislators are generally busy people and sometimes their schedules may run late.

Be confident! Remember that your legislator is just another human like you and they were elected to this position because they want to hear from their constituents.

If the legislator asks questions you aren't sure about, reply that you are unsure and will get back to them. This will also give you another chance to interact with them.

Don't be afraid to ask your legislator about their opinion of the policy. They can give you feedback as to whether you can count on them for support, or suggestions they may have in order to gain their support.

Remember to leave the legislator with the printed materials you brought.

Thank the legislator for their time and let them know they can reach out to you for any further questions about the policy.

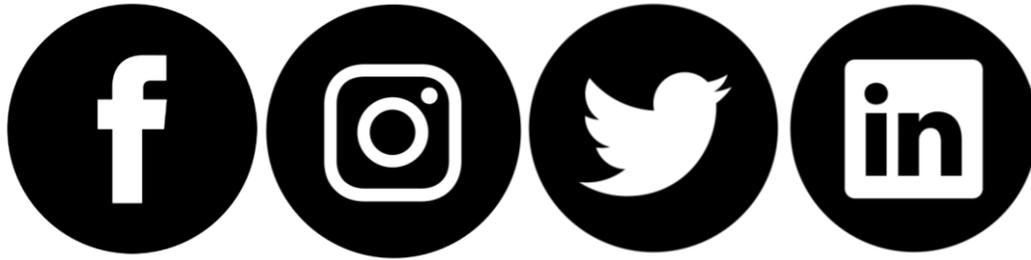
Step 4: Send Thank You Card or E-mail

After your visit with your legislator, don't forget to send them a card or e-mail thanking them for the time they spent discussing the policy with you. Never underestimate the power of a thank you!

SOCIAL MEDIA

Another basic way to advocate which anyone can partake in is through social media. As we have seen in recent elections, social media can be a powerful tool for promoting ideals and beliefs. Social media can be harnessed in the same way to help support your advocacy efforts. Here are some tips on how to amplify your position through social media.

1. **Make sure your message is clear and concise** – Using your talking points is a good way to quickly and effectively get your message across to those reading your post.
2. **Use visuals** – They say a picture is worth a thousand words. Visuals are an eye-catching way to draw your audience in. Visuals include pictures, videos, or infographics.
3. **Tag people** – Don't hesitate to tag your legislators or other key stake holders in posts you want them to see.
4. **Use #hashtags** – Hashtags make it easy for people to find posts related to certain topics. If you're lucky, you may even start trending!
5. **Post often** – The more you post, the more your message will be out there!
6. **Engage** – Besides making your own post, make the initiative to engage in other posts related to your topic, or engage in posts made by your legislators or key stakeholders.
7. **Follow** - Follow or friend your legislators and key stakeholders to make sure you don't miss an opportunity to engage in their posts.



***Follow Oral Health Kansas on Social Media!
And subscribe to our
Weekly Wednesday Updates!***

We thank you for taking this step towards advocating for policies that would improve oral health for Kansans! For more information on oral health advocacy, please contact us or visit our website!

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