

UNDERSTANDING LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY FOR CHILDREN IN NORTH CAROLINA

A GUIDE TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Tiffany Gladney, Policy Director, NC Child

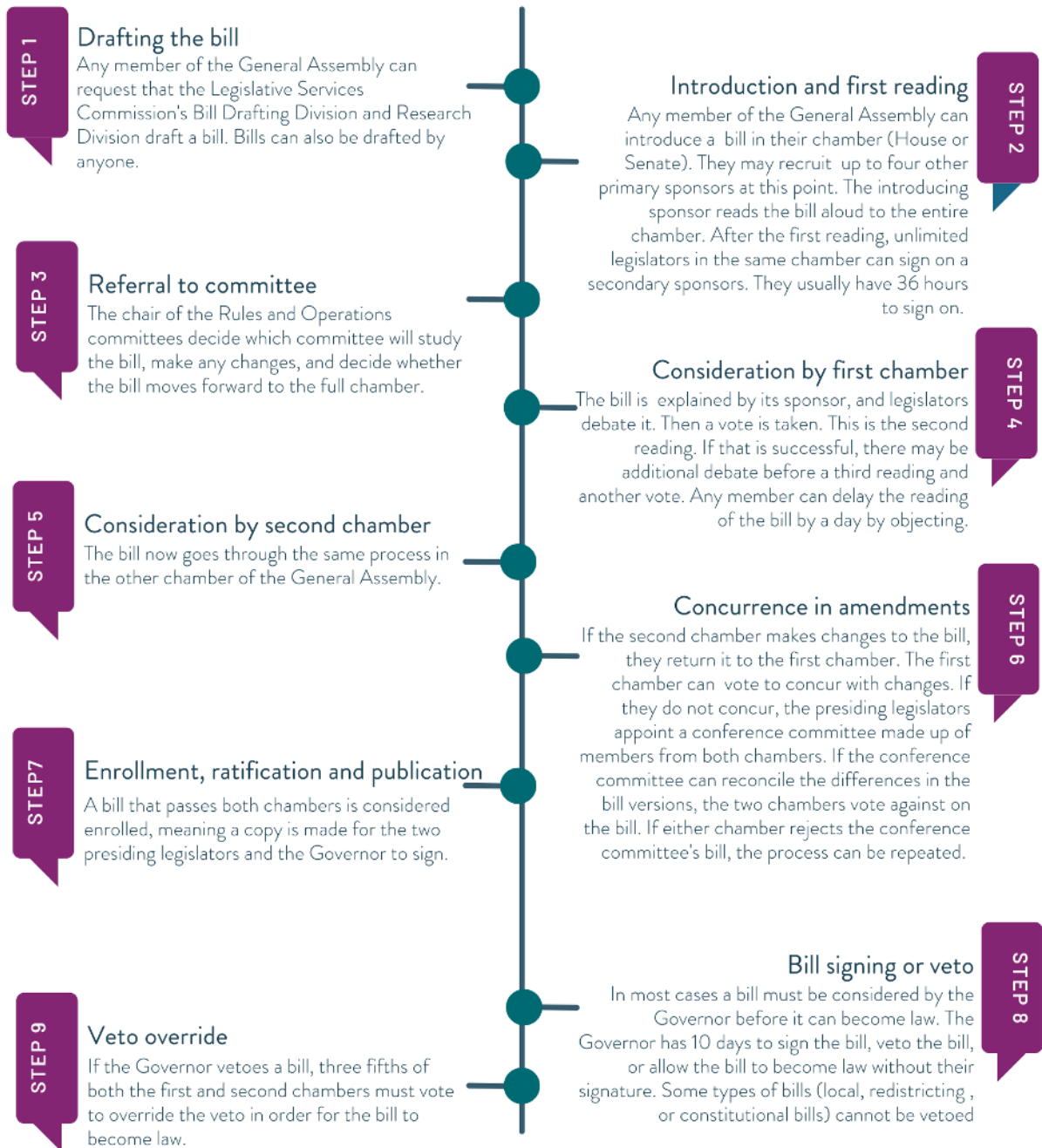


This tool is intended to empower NC Child staff and Child Advocacy Network (CAN) members by affording a greater understanding of the NC General Assembly, the legislative process, and the power brokers on Jones Street. Use these modules to educate yourself as an advocate in the civic engagement process on behalf of North Carolina children and their communities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. [How a bill becomes law in North Carolina](#)
2. [What's in a title: Legislative job descriptions](#)
3. [Key terms: Legislative jargon](#)
4. [Who are the NC General Assembly decision makers?](#)
5. [The distinction between administrative and legislative policy changes](#)
6. [Kinds of advocacy](#)
7. [Keeping up with Jones Street](#)

1: HOW A BILL BECOMES LAW IN NORTH CAROLINA



2: WHAT'S IN A TITLE: LEGISLATIVE JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Governor: The governor serves as the state's president. The governor manages the state budget in conjunction with General Assembly chamber leaders and administers funds and loans from the federal government.

Lt. Governor: The Lieutenant Governor serves as the president of the State Senate and as a member of the Governor's Council of State. The Lieutenant Governor serves on various boards and commissions and must fulfill the duties of Governor in the event of the Governor's absence or death. Since the Lieutenant Governor is elected on a separate ticket from the Governor, it is possible that they may be of a different political party affiliation.

Secretary of...: heads up the state's administrative agency and ensures the department fosters ethical and competitive business practices.

Speaker of the House: runs the House of Representatives, elected by members of the majority party. Remember the 3H's, "*Head House Honcho.*"

President Pro Tempore: Although the Lt. Governor is the technically the head of the senate in an official sense, the President Pro Tempore, elected by members of the majority party in the Senate, is in practice the leader of the Senate. Just like with the Speaker of the House, they have the authority to determine which bills will be considered by the full chamber. Remember the 3 S's, "*Senate Senior Supervisor.*"

Legislative Assistant: The primary staff member to a member of the NC General Assembly, they often coordinate the member's schedule, correspond with constituents on behalf of the legislator, monitor committee discussion and activity, research various topics, and compose talking points and speeches. LAs are often the gatekeeper to the legislator.

Sergeant of Arms: charged with enforcing the directions of the President of the Senate or the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The Sergeant's office is responsible for the security of the respective legislative body and maintenance of property of that house.

Lobbyist: a representative of a special interest group whose function is to influence legislation in their principal's favor. Staff who spend a significant amount of time lobbying must register with the Secretary of State each year to comply with state lobbying laws.

3: KEY TERMS: LEGISLATIVE JARGON

Appropriation: money allocated by the NC General Assembly from the state's general fund

Caucus: an informal meeting of a group of the members; most commonly based on political party affiliation. Caucuses may have other bases, such as gender, race, geographic location, or specific issue. Caucus meetings do not include formal hearings or votes, and as such are not subject to public notice or open meetings laws.

Crossover: a self-imposed deadline by the legislature, in which a bill must have passed either chamber to remain viable for the current biennial legislative session. If a bill is not eligible for crossover, it typically is dead for the rest of that biennium (unless the content is added to another bill as a PCS or amendment).

Engrossed: when a bill is passed with revisions incorporated in it by both chambers

PCS: proposed committee substitute, a revision to existing legislation. One way to work around a bill that's stalling in committee is adding it to another bill, known as a proposed committee substitute (PCS). Typically, a PCS is introduced early in the committee meeting process and is usually approved and then debated. It is often the vehicle for substantial changes to the bill and can even alter the original intent of the bill. It is usually up to the committee chair to determine if a PCS is acceptable or not. If a bill isn't heard and subsequently passes committee, it has very little chance of becoming law in that session.

Reading: happens at the time of a floor vote (full vote of House or Senate). Every bill must pass three readings before it can advance into the subsequent chamber and/or reach the Governor's desk to be signed into law. In practice, first reading typically happens when the bill is introduced on the floor, and second and third reading usually occur on the same day.

Sine Dine: the *final* final day of that year's legislative session; no takebacks

Skeletal Session: when a chamber assembles on the floor as a formality, rather than to vote. No voting occurs during a skeletal session.

Veto: "Thanks, but no thanks." An action that can be taken by the Governor to override the passage of legislation via the NC General Assembly. The General Assembly can either attempt to override the Governor's veto, (which requires 3/5 of the chamber's approval); revise the legislation; or let the veto stand.

Yield: When a member allows time for a question or comment from another member on the chamber floor.

4: WHO ARE THE NC GENERAL ASSEMBLY DECISION MAKERS?

CHAMBER LEADERSHIP

- **The Speaker of the House** runs the House of Representatives and is elected by members of the majority party. Remember the 3H's, "*Head House Honcho.*"
- **The Lieutenant Governor**, head of the Senate, typically presides over Senate sessions and can cast a tie breaker vote if the instance arises.
- **The President Pro Tempore** is second in command in the Senate, elected by majority members. Remember the 3 S's, "*Second Senior Supervisor.*"

The Speaker and the President Pro Tempore are integral to the success or failure of legislation, in part because they can stop a bill from being heard on the floor of their respective chambers, as well as because they wield authority over committee chairs, who they assign, so they can truly ground a bill before it takes off.

COMMITTEES

Note on committees: Most bills start in the Rules Committee. Most bills relevant to NC Child's policy agenda must pass through Appropriations, Education, Health and Human Services, Health, and/or Families, Children and Aging committees. However, there are always outliers, which is why the Policy Director and contract lobbyist monitor all committee activity on Jones Street. Check the web page of each committee to learn who the current chair is.

Key committees in both chambers

- **Rules committee chairs** schedule meetings and assign bills to appropriate committees.
- **Appropriations committee chairs** are also the state's budget writers. They may seek counsel from various advocacy groups, staff, constituents, and lobbyists, but they are the ultimate authors of the budget.

House committees of interest

- Appropriations
- Education Appropriations
- Health and Human Services
- Families, Children and Aging Policy

- Finance
- Health

Senate committees of interest

- Education/Higher Education Appropriations
- Health and Human Services Appropriations
- Base Budget Appropriations
- Health Care

PARTY LEADERSHIP

Both the House and Senate will have a majority leaders who leads the majority party in each chamber. The leader also works in conjunction with chamber and committee leadership to determine caucus content (Caucus in this context is when each party meets privately to discuss how the party will vote on issues or bills). Caucus meetings often play a crucial role in the success or demise of legislation. Majority members with seniority also have a lot of influence.

Each chamber will also have minority leaders, although they have less influence while their party is not in power.

5: THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN ADMINISTRATIVE AND LEGISLATIVE POLICY CHANGES

Legislative policy changes: When a law is created or revised by the NC General Assembly, it must not only pass the full state legislature but also be signed into law by the governor. Legislative policy changes often require advocacy, including direct lobbying, and grassroots lobbying. Legislators and the governor are mandatory parts of the legislative policy change process.

Administrative policy change: When rules, guidance, and implementation of ratified laws are developed, recommended, amended, and ultimately determined by the leading state agency that oversees the specific policy or practice. Administrative advocacy ideally requires content experts, people with lived experience of the program and or policy in question, as well as other stakeholders impacted by the policy or program. Often the goal of administrative advocacy is to develop and implement substantive, content-specific, changes within the context of a specific state-run agency such as DHHS.

HOW LEGISLATIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGE HAVE RECENTLY IMPACTED NORTH CAROLINA CHILDREN

Raise the Age (legislative advocacy)

- “In the first year, ending December 1, 2020, the law kept 4,300 16- and 17-year-olds in the juvenile justice system who might otherwise have been prosecuted as adults.”
- Source: <https://www.newsobserver.com/article248023695.html>

Postpartum Medicaid Extension (legislative advocacy)

- The new extension of postpartum Medicaid benefits from 6 weeks to 12 months will help reduce maternal deaths, infant mortality and promote healthy development among approximately 24,000 babies born each year.
- Source: [Estimate from the NC Department of Health and Human Services.](#)

Local Advocacy (legislative advocacy)

- Local advocates in Guilford County successfully advocated for county funds to go towards hiring school nurses, resulting in a \$1M investment in 15 new nursing positions.
- Source: [Guilford County Budget 2021 – 2022](#), page 10.

Lowering the Lead Hazard Level in Children’s Drinking Water (legislative advocacy)

- The recent revision of the definition of a lead hazard in children’s drinking water in the Childhood Lead Poisoning Statute from 15 to 10 parts per billion extends lead exposure protection to more than 30,000 young children, particularly in child care settings.

- Source: Data analysis by NC Child and Duke Environmental Law & Policy Clinic. [Blog post on this topic.](#)

Lead Testing in Drinking Water (administrative advocacy)

- In 2019, NC Child successfully advocated for a public health rule amendment to require all licensed child care centers to test their drinking water for lead every three years and take action when elevated lead levels are found. This policy change helps ensure that 230,000 babies and young children who attend licensed child care centers in North Carolina have access to drinking water that is free from lead contamination.
- Data source: [Fiscal Impact Statement for 15A NCAC 18A .2816: Lead Poisoning Hazards in Child Care Centers](#)

6: KINDS OF ADVOCACY

Advocacy is how you advance policies or changes that align with your organization's mission. Think of advocacy as an umbrella with various strategies under it. NC Child uses the following strategies.

- **Direct lobbying:** attempting to influence legislators on how to vote for particular existing or potential legislation through direct communication.
- **Grassroots lobbying:** asking others to engage with legislators, for example, through action alerts. The most important touch point that can be made with a legislator is from their constituents.
- **Coalition building:** garnering, inviting, and collaborating with multiple organizations to spend time and resources on agreed upon issues
- **Organizing:** mobilizing community members and joining forces to address specific issues, advance a mission, and/or build community power. Organizing often includes using the other advocacy tools listed here in service of a long-term vision.
- **Administrative advocacy:** advocating for policy change through rule development, changes, or implementation, often approved by state government agencies. Administrative advocacy takes place at all levels of government—federal, state, and local – and may or may not include policies that are determined through the legislative process.

EXAMPLES OF ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

- Bernitha is the executive director of Families on the Road Inc. She emailed a legislator because she had concerns about the length of time teenagers must wait to get their license. The legislator responds and invites Bernitha to come meet with her in her legislative office. The meeting is a success, and the legislator files a bill to shorten the amount of supervised driving hours a minor must complete before they are eligible for a license. (direct lobbying)
- NC Child sends Lupe an email asking her to contact her member of congress and ask them to support the Build Back Better package, specifically the provisions around childcare affordability. Lupe had a few minutes, so she did just that and sent an email to her member of Congress. (grassroots lobbying by NC Child, direct lobbying by Lupe)
- Sumit works for Vote Today! He is working on an advocacy campaign to ask the State Board of Elections to distribute free chocolate chip cookies to all voters. He's invited a few of his partners from other organizations to see if they'd be interested in lobbying with him for free chocolate chip cookies. 13 organizations agree to join forces with Sumit and Vote Today! The coalition meets with the State

Board of Elections, who agree to support the cookie distribution plan using available funding.
(administrative advocacy)

- Quentin wants to convince legislators to do more to fight climate change. He and his friends recruit students from campuses all over the state to host town hall events and meet with their home legislators about their concerns for the future. As a result of their work, several coastal legislators express their concerns about sea level rise and eventually sign on as cosponsors of a bipartisan bill to reduce CO₂ emissions, and several student groups addressing climate change are created.
(organizing)
- Steven wants to raise awareness about Medicaid expansion. Steven and his friends recruit 350 people to dress as hospital patients and lay on the floor outside of the House chamber in Raleigh. The event results in several news stories. (direct action)

7: KEEPING UP WITH JONES STREET

Twitter is the best place to follow North Carolina policy advocates and political reporters.

News accounts to follow

- Under the Dome (The News & Observer's Capitol account), @underthedome
- UNC's School of Government Legislative Reporting Service @sog_lrs
- Laura Leslie of WRAL, @LauraLeslieWRAL
- Keung Hui, K-12 Education Reporter for The News & Observer, @nckhui
- Dawn Vaughn, Politics reporter for The News & Observer, @dawnbvaughn
- Colin Campbell, Capitol reporter for NC Tribune and Business North Carolina @RaleighReporter
- Rose Hoban, Founder of NC Health News, @rosehoban
- NC Health News, @NCHealthNews

Hashtags to follow

- #ncpol
- #ncga
- Hashtags specific to your issue, including #SolveChildCare, #CloseTheGapNC, and #ExpandMedicaid