

How to Use Legislature's Website to Research Bills and Provide Comments

Key Website Pages:

<http://leg.wa.gov/> Legislature's Home Page

<http://leg.wa.gov/lic/Pages/default.aspx> Legislative Information Center (This shows you all you need to know!)

<http://leg.wa.gov/LIC/Pages/hotline.aspx> How to comment on a bill with instructions and links

Legislative Hotline: 1-800-562-6000

It's easy to provide useful comment to your legislators using tools provided by the Washington State Legislative Website and Hotline. You can:

- write and mail them a letter (probably the most effective, least convenient...)
- call their office,
- email them directly,
- call the legislative hotline and leave them a message, or
- send a message about a bill through an easy to use on-line tool

Call their office. You can contact legislators through their phone numbers and legislative offices. You can find their phone numbers and links to individual legislator webpages with office and other information at <http://leg.wa.gov/LIC/Pages/Rosters.aspx>

Email Legislators Directly. You can contact legislators directly using their email addresses. These are found at <http://app.leg.wa.gov/MemberEmail/Default.aspx> If you click on the legislator's name, a form pops up to make it easy to comment. This list also shows their email address if you want to email them directly. (note that legislators may get 5,000-10,000 messages a year...)

Call the Legislative Hotline and leave them a message. Follow these steps:

1. Call the toll-free legislative hotline at **1-800-562-6000**. The hotline is open from 8 AM to 8 PM Monday through Friday.
2. Tell them you have a message for all your legislators (you have two representatives and one senator – they will know who they are due to your address – you don't have to know their names). If you also want it to go to the Governor and Lt. Governor, you need to tell them (I recommend you make this request so the Executive branch hears your comment also). They will ask you for your name and address.

3. Then give them your message, for instance, that you want them to vote in support of a certain bill or you want a change made to a certain bill. Provide the name and/or number of the bill if you can. There may be a House Bill (HB), a Senate Bill (SB), or both.
4. You can also tell them that you have a specific message for your elected officials (optional) and add a brief message if you'd like, such as why it is important to you. There's no limit on the message, but it is difficult for staff to keep up with incoming calls and record long messages, so brief is helpful. Have this thought through before you call so you can keep it short and easy to understand.

Use the on-line tool to send a message about a specific bill. This is a great new service, still in some initial stages. In-coming comments are compiled in a database so that any legislator can see the comments on a specific bill from everyone, or just from their constituents. This allows the legislator to see the comments when they want to (such as when they are ready to take action on a specific bill) but it also relies on the legislator or their aide to access the database – messages and daily “digests” are not sent automatically.

To use the on-line tool, start on the bill summary page of any bill or be guided through the process by starting at this webpage: <https://app.leg.wa.gov/pbc/>

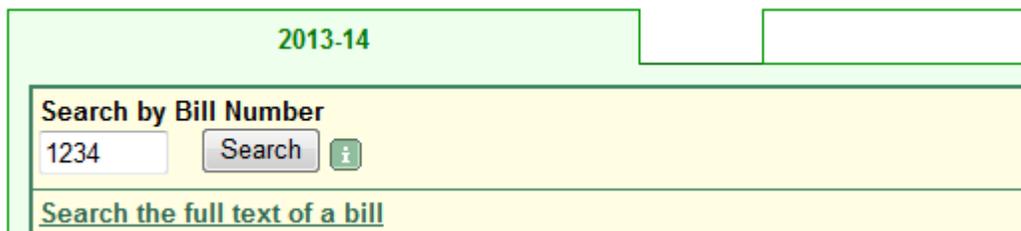
It reads:

How to comment on a bill

The Legislature has implemented a system designed to allow the public to send comments about bills to their legislators.

If you know the bill number

Go to the [Bill Information page](#), enter the bill number in the Search by Bill Number field, then click **Search**.



The screenshot shows a search interface with a light green header containing the text "2013-14". Below the header is a yellow search box with the title "Search by Bill Number". Inside the search box, there is a text input field containing the number "1234", a "Search" button, and a small information icon. Below the search box is a link that says "Search the full text of a bill".

The applicable Bill Summary Page appears. Click the **Comment on this bill** button to the right of the bill number, then complete the comment form.

HB 1234 - 2013-14  [\(What is this?\)](#)

[Comment on this bill](#) [\(What is this?\)](#)

Delaying new storm water requirements for phase I jurisdictions.

[Go to the Bill Information Page](#)

If you don't know the bill number

Go to the [Bills by Topic page](#).

Click the **By Subject** radio button to view a list of categories. Navigate to the category that is closest to your bill's topic, then click **Continue**. If you wish to see all categories, click the **All** link at the beginning of the alphabetical listing.

Bills By Topic

Select a Search Method:

By Bill Number By Subject

ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE, OFFICE

ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE, OFFICE

ACCOUNTANCY, BOARD

ACCOUNTS

ACTIONS AND PROCEEDINGS

ACTUARY, OFFICE OF STATE

By Letter: [ALL](#) <#> [A](#) [B](#) [C](#) [D](#) [E](#) [F](#) [G](#) [H](#) [I](#) [J](#) [K](#) [L](#) [M](#) [N](#) [O](#) [P](#) [Q](#) [R](#) [S](#) [T](#) [U](#) [V](#) [W](#) [X](#) [Y](#) [Z](#)

[Continue](#)

Bills that are assigned to the selected category are listed within each topic.

To open the Bill Summary Page for a bill, click the bill number that appears after the descriptive text. If the link is bold-faced, the bill was passed into law.

Bills by Topic Results

[ADOPTION](#)

Birth certificates, provisions concerning adopted persons and birth parents: [HB 1525](#), * [SHB 1525, CH 321 \(2013\)](#), [SB 5118](#), [ESSB 5118](#)

Improvements to adoption process, implementing certain recommendations: [HB 1675](#), [ESHB 1675](#)

Parental fitness for adopting, basing determination on religious or philosophical beliefs about child discipline, prohibiting: [ESHB 1675](#)

[Go to the Bills By Topic Page](#)

Other Uses of the Legislative Hotline (1-800-562-6000) The Hotline staff will also fulfill requests for bills and other legislative documents and can answer questions about committee meeting times and places, pending legislation and the legislative process. They are very helpful and eager to assist citizens.

How to Get Information on Bills. Often, relying on alerts from organizations is a useful way to know what is happening with a bill (good or bad changes, etc.) and when to comment. However, alerts often cover a small number of key bills and you might have interest in other pieces of legislation. You can learn a lot through the Legislature's website

1. Go to <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/billinfo/>
2. Enter the bill number if you know it. Or, try "Search the full text of a bill" and type in the key subject (like "Puget Sound"), selecting the areas you wish to search (probably Amendments and Bills 2013-14). Or, you can click open "Bills by Topic", select "By Subject" and try some likely subjects. These are somewhat limited so you have to hunt around.
3. Once you have the bill number, you can use it to see companion bill links, bill digests and reports, see its history and revisions, know what committee the bill is in, see fiscal notes and much more. And as explained above, to provide bill specific comments.

[WWW.TVW.ORG](http://www.tvw.org)

TVW is a remarkable resource. It is Washington's public affairs network covering Legislative sessions including live and archived video of most key legislative committee hearings and Senate and House floor votes. If you want to see what's going on, hear what lobbyists are saying on bills you are following, or learn what public hearings on bills are like so you can comment in person yourself, TVW is your friend.

Additional Sources of Information on Bills and Issues

Environmental Priorities Coalition. The Coalition prioritizes a small number of key environmental bills and initiatives each year. Their website provides information on the priorities, a weekly House and Senate “hot sheet” on key bills each week, a media center and “take action” opportunities. You can sign up to receive their email alerts.

<http://environmentalpriorities.org/>

League of Women Voters of Washington. The League develops legislative priorities each year that include a wide range of issues, including environmental concerns. Their website provides information on the priorities and you can sign up to receive their legislative newsletter and action alerts. <http://www.lwvwa.org/>

Understanding Timing of the Legislature

A large number of bills are introduced each year and only a fraction gets adopted. Many fall to the wayside due to opposition, lack of time, lack of organized support, etc. Bills need to meet certain deadlines to remain active as well.

The regular legislative session varies in length every other year. Odd numbered years are “long sessions” (105 days) and even numbered years are “short sessions” (60 days). The Legislative Cycle is two years and starts with a long session. Bills that do not get passed during the long session may be carried over and worked on during the following short session. Bills from a short session do not carry over to the next long session.

For 2016 (short) session, here are some notable dates:

- January 11 - First day of Session
- February 5 – Last day to pass bills out of committee in house of origin. (some exceptions)
- February 17, 5 pm – Last day to consider (pass) bills in their house of origin. (some exceptions)
- February 26, – Last day to pass bills out of committee from opposite house of origin. (some exceptions)
- March 4, 5 pm – Last day to pass opposite house bills (some exceptions)
- March 10 – Last day allowed for regular session under state constitution (for comparison the last day of the long session in 2015 was April 26.)

What this means for a bill: A bill originating in the House must make it out of its committee of origin (for instance Environment Committee) by February 5 or it is essentially “dead” for that session. If the bill passes out of the committee of origin then must make it through any other committees in the House it needs to go through and be passed by the House by February 17, or it is essentially “dead.” Let’s say it has passed in the House. Next it must make it through relevant Senate committees and be moved forward for a full vote of the Senate. Likewise, if it doesn’t meet the relevant dates, it has failed to gain passage. This timeline shows the importance of discussing the status of bills at Sound Waters each year!