94th General Assembly: Communicating with Your Legislators

With the 94th General Assembly of the Arkansas Legislature set to kick off on January 9, it’s time to brush up on a few basics. From the Arkansas Municipal League’s role in the legislative process to a breakdown of standing committee assignments for both chambers, the information on the following pages is essential to veteran and newly elected officials alike.

Charged with the responsibility to act as spokesman for Arkansas’ cities and towns during the legislative sessions, the League, in accordance with the legislative policy set forth in the policy statement, assists in developing legislation of interest to all municipal governments and in following other legislation that affects cities and towns.

During the session, League staff will be working on behalf of the cities and towns of Arkansas to promote and protect the interests of Arkansas municipalities. Influencing lawmakers should be considered a team effort of local municipal officials and the League staff. Working together, we can make each session a success for Arkansas municipalities.

Staying informed during the legislative session is crucial to the process. The Legislative Action Center at arml.org includes a variety of links to search and track bills, contact information for legislators and more. Sign up for the ListServ to ensure you receive regular “Legislative Roundup” dispatches from the Legislative Advocacy team—just follow the link under eCommunications on the AML homepage.

Arkansas General Assembly 101

The Arkansas Constitution calls for the General Assembly to meet on the second Monday of January of each odd-numbered year. Arkansas voters in 2008 passed Amendment 86, which requires the legislature to meet in even-numbered years beginning in 2010 for a 30-day fiscal session. There are 135 members of the General Assembly. The Senate has 35 members; the House of Representatives has 100. The lieutenant governor presides as president pro tempore of the Senate; and the speaker, who is elected by House members, presides in the House. Members may hold office for a total of 16 years of any combination in either chamber.

The process of making a bill become law begins in the committees. Committee meetings are open to the public, and the public is often asked to testify. During the legislative session, committees usually meet in the morning to hear bills. Standing committees consist of legislators study and hear legislative proposals according to subject matter. There are 10 standing Senate committees that report back to the Senate with recommendations after committee hearings. Each senator serves on two of the standing committees. Each standing committee has eight members, which includes a chair and vice chair. There are 10 standing House committees. Each representative serves on two standing committees. Each House committee has 20 members, which includes a chair and vice chair appointed by the Speaker of the house.

How a Bill Becomes an Arkansas Law

A bill is simply an idea that someone would like to become law. The idea can come from anyone, but only a representative or senator can take that idea and guide it through the General Assembly. Once a bill is introduced by a legislator, it is referred to a committee. The full committee holds hearings on the bill and may consider it in its original form or amend it prior to voting on the bill. All bills must obtain a majority vote of the committee members in order to be recommended for passage. It is in the committee where the bill is usually amended, tabled or killed.

If the bill receives a “do pass” recommendation by the majority of the committee, then it is ready for the House or Senate floor where it may be debated. If the bill passes, it is then sent to the other chamber where the same process is repeated. It should be understood that the bulk of legislative work is done by standing committees and not, as commonly believed, by debate during floor sessions.

Once both the House and Senate agree on the exact language of the bill, it is sent to the governor for their signature. If the Governor signs the bill it becomes law, usually upon the governor’s signing if it is an emergency clause. Should the governor veto the bill, the legislature has the option of trying to override the veto with a simple majority vote.
Senator or Representative has bill drafted by Bureau of Legislative Research

Chief Clerk of House or Secretary of the Senate assigns a bill number

Bill gets 1st and 2nd reading before the full House or Senate

Bill is assigned to appropriate committee and hearing is conducted. Committee action results in:

- **DO PASS**
- **RECOMMENDATION**
- **DO PASS AS AMENDED**
- **DO NOT PASS**
- **REFERRED TO JOINT INTERIM COMMITTEE**

Referred to full house

If amended on floor, return to Committee for approval

Placed on calendar for 3rd reading and floor debate (bill sponsor is only one to bring it up for consideration)

When passed by one house, the bill is sent to the other chamber where **entire process is repeated**

Other chamber passes bill as is

If other chamber adds amendment bill must be returned to original chamber for concurrence

If not concurred, bill dies or goes to Joint Conference Committee. If agreement reached by committee, then

To Governor

Sign bill and it becomes law

Veto

Not sign it within five days and it becomes law without signature—20 days after end of session

Legislature may override veto with majority vote in both House and Senate
State Senate Districts Map

State Senate Districts are identified by color code and number.
The official maps are available from the Arkansas Secretary of State’s office or online at www.sos.arkansas.gov.

Interactive Senate Map: mydistricting.arkansas.gov/legdistricting/comments/plan/32/9

KEY MUNICIPAL PRINCIPLES

The Concept of Local Control
The Arkansas Municipal League strongly believes in the philosophy of local control that allows municipal governments maximum flexibility and discretion in governing themselves. Local control should remain. We urge the state legislature to resist imposing additional, mandated responsibilities upon local governments without providing the financial resources to fund such mandates. Preemption of local control should also be avoided.

Protection of Local Sales Tax
The League strongly believes that the state should protect the authority of cities and towns to levy local sales taxes. Local sales taxes are used for municipal operations and numerous local capital improvement projects, including public safety, public works and recreation facilities. The League policy is that the state should avoid raising the state sales tax and granting sales tax exemptions. The state should concentrate on broadening the sales tax base and having as low a sales tax rate as possible. The League also maintains that the state should see that state turnback to municipalities is maintained at a level commensurate with the responsibilities of municipal government.
Public Health, Welfare & Labor
This committee reviews matters pertaining to public health, mental health, intellectual disabilities, public welfare, human relations and resources, the aged and problems of the aging, environmental affairs, water and air pollution, labor and labor relations, and similar legislation.

Missy Irvin, Chair (18)  
Dan Sullivan, Vice-Chair (21)  
Scott Flippo (17)

David Wallace (22)  
Bryan King (28)  
Clint Penzo (31)

Justin Boyd (27)  
Fred Love (15)

Revenue & Taxation
This committee reviews matters pertaining to the levy, increase, reduction, collection, enforcement, and administration of taxes and other revenue-producing measures.

Jimmy Hickey, Chair (11)  
Jim Petty, Vice-Chair (29)

Jonathan Dismang (28)  
Ronald Caldwell (23)

Blake Johnson (20)  
Steve Crowell (3)

Tyler Dees (35)  
John Payton (22)

Education
This committee reviews matters pertaining to public kindergarten, elementary, secondary, and adult education, vocational education, vocational-technical schools, vocational rehabilitation, higher education, private educational institutions, and similar legislation.

Jane English, Chair (34)  
Linda Chesterfield, Vice-Chair (30)  
Breanne Davis (16)

Greg Leding (4)  
Kim Hammer (33)  
Joshua Bryant (32)

Matt Stone (2)  
Jim Dotson (34)

Judiciary
This committee reviews matters pertaining to state and local courts, court clerks, stenographers, other employees of the courts, civil and criminal procedures, probate matters, civil and criminal laws, and similar matters.

Gary Stubblefield, Chair (6)  
Stephanie Flowers, Vice-Chair (25)  
Bart Hester (1)

Clarke Tucker (32)  
Ben Gilmore (26)  
Matt McKee (6)

Terry Rice (9)  
Alan Clark (13)

Water District Funding
State water loans and grants should be used efficiently. Funding rural water districts at exorbitant costs per user is not wise usage of public funds and unnecessarily leads to urbanization of our state’s natural areas, which more properly should be utilized for agriculture, hunting, fishing and other outdoor activities our beautiful state makes possible.

Highways and Street Programs
The League holds that any new highway program should consider all segments of our statewide transportation network, including state highways, county roads and city streets. Therefore, any new highway program that generates revenue should include the traditional 70-15-15 (70 percent to the state, 15 percent to the cities, 15 percent to the counties) formula that has been successful in the past. A state aid street program is now in effect by virtue of Amendment 91, passed in 2012 and should be supported and maintained as approved by the electorate.
94th General Assembly Senate Standing Committees: Class “B”

Agriculture, Forestry & Economic Development
This committee reviews matters pertaining to agriculture, livestock, forestry, industrial development, natural resources, oil and gas, publicity and parks, levees and drainage, rivers and harbors, and similar legislation.

Ronald Caldwell, Chair
Matt Stone, Vice-Chair
David Wallace
Breanne Davis
Greg Leding
Ben Gilmore
Tyler Dees
Fred Love

Insurance & Commerce
This committee reviews matters pertaining to banks and banking, savings and loan associations, stocks, bonds, other securities, securities dealers, insurance, public utilities, partnerships and corporations, home mortgage financing and housing, and similar legislation.

Ricky Hill, Chair (29)
Reginald Murdock, Vice Chair (9)
Missy Irvin
Jonathan Dismang
Jimmy Hickey Jr.
Mark Johnson (15)
Clint Penzo
Justin Boyd

City, County & Local Affairs
This committee reviews matters pertaining to city and municipal affairs, county affairs, local improvement districts, inter-local governmental cooperation, and similar legislation.

Scott Flippo, Chair
Terry Rice, Vice-Chair
Gary Stubblefield
Kim Hammer
Dan Sullivan
Matt McKee
Jim Petty
Joshua Bryant

State Agencies & Governmental Affairs
This committee reviews matters pertaining to state government and state agencies, except where the subject matter relates more appropriately to another committee, proposed amendments to the Constitution of the State of Arkansas or the federal government, election laws and procedures, federal and interstate relations, and similar legislation. The committee also monitors and makes recommendations for periodic updating, modernizing, and revising the Code of Ethics for public officials.

Blake Johnson, Chair
Clarke Tucker, Vice-Chair
Stephanie Flowers
Bart Hester
Bryan King
Steve Crowell
John Payton
Jim Dotson

94th General Assembly Senate Standing Committee: Class “C”

Transportation, Technology & Legislative Affairs
This committee reviews matters pertaining to roads, highway safety, airports and air transportation, common carriers, mass transits, and similar legislation; matters pertaining to science, technology, bio-technology, and similar legislation; and other matters whenever the subject matter is not germane to the subject matter of any other Class “A” or Class “B” Committee. The committee serves as the supervisory committee over the preparation of the journal and the engrossing and enrolling of bills. The committee does not have jurisdiction of matters affecting the interpretation of the rules of the Senate, but such jurisdiction is exercised by the Senate Rules Committee.

Mark Johnson, Chair
Justin Boyd, Vice-Chair
Linda Chesterfield
Jane English
Terry Rice
Ricky Hill
Reginald Murdock
Alan Clark

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State House Districts Map

State House Districts are identified by color code and number. The official maps are available from the Arkansas Secretary of State’s office or online at www.sos.arkansas.gov.

Interactive House Map: mydistricting.arkansas.gov/legdistricting/comments/plan/33/9
Education
This committee reviews matters pertaining to public kindergarten, elementary, secondary, and adult education, vocational education, vocational-technical schools, vocational rehabilitation, higher education, private educational institutions, similar legislation, and resolutions germane to the subject matter of the committee. (House Rules 62.1)

Stephen Meeks (67)  Lanny Fite (23)  Carlton Wing (38)  Steven Walker (27)
Bruce Cozart (24)  Vivian Flowers (17)  Denise Garner (84)  Wayne Long (39)
Charlene Fite (80)  DeAnn Vaught (4)  Brian S. Evans (43)  Hope Duke (12)
Ron McNair (98)  John Maddox (20)  Keith Brooks (31)  Stetson Painter (3)
Rick Beck (65)  Sonia Eubanks Barker (7)  Grant Hodges (14)  Brit McKenzie (7)

Judiciary
This committee reviews matters pertaining to state and local courts, court clerks, stenographers, other employees of the courts, civil and criminal procedures, probate matters, civil and criminal laws, similar matters, and resolutions germane to the subject matter of the committee. (House Rules 62.2)

Milton Nicks Jr. (50)  Stan Berry (68)  Jay Richardson (78)  Kendon Underwood (90)
Marcus E. Richmond (21)  Cindy Crawford (76)  Andrew Collins (35)  Jeremiah Moore (61)
Jimmy Gazaway (57)  Jamie Scott (37)  Tippi McCullough (33)  Matt Duffield (53)
Danny Watson (3)  Nicole Clowney (86)  Ashley Hudson (32)  Steven Unger (19)
Carol Dalby (1)  Cameron Cooper (44)  Jon Milligan (53)  Shad Pearce (40)

Public Health, Welfare & Labor
This committee reviews matters pertaining to public health, mental health, intellectual disabilities, public welfare, human relations and resources, environmental affairs, water and air pollution, labor and labor relations, similar legislation and resolutions germane to the subject matter of the committee. (House Rules 62.3)

Jeffrey Wardlaw (8)  Deborah Ferguson (51)  Fred Allen (30)  Kendra Moore (23)
Jon S. Eubanks (74)  Jack Ladyman (59)  Aaron Pilkington (69)  Ryan A. Rose (48)
Stephen Magie (72)  Mary Bentley (73)  Mark Perry (42)  Zachary Gramlich (50)
Josh Miller (66)  Justin Gonzales (19)  Lee Johnson (75)  R. Scott Richardson (13)
Richard Womack (18)  Kenneth Ferguson (16)  Bart Schulz (28)  Jeremy Wooldridge (1)

Public Transportation
This committee reviews matters pertaining to roads and highways, city streets, county roads, highway safety, airports and air transportation, common and contract carriers, mass transit, similar legislation, and resolutions germane to the subject matter of the committee. (House Rules 62.4)

Matthew J. Shepherd (6)  Harlan Breaux (97)  Mark H. Berry (82)  Chad Puryear (25)
Mike Holcomb (10)  Denise Ennett (36)  Brandon C. Achor (71)  Tara Shephard (79)
David Whitaker (85)  Joy C. Springer (34)  RJ Hawk (81)  DeAnna Hodges (9)
Dwight Tosh (52)  Mark D. McElroy (11)  Matthew Brown (55)  Trey Steimel (2)
Austin McCollum (95)  Rick McClure (26)  Joey L. Carr (34)  Wade Andrews (98)

Revenue & Taxation
This committee reviews matters pertaining to the levy, increase, reduction, collection, enforcement and administration of taxes and other revenue-producing measures, and considers resolutions germane to the subject matter of the committee. (House Rules 62.5)

Lane Jean (2)  Frances Cavanaugh (60)  Jim Wooten (45)  Delia J. Haak (91)
Les Eaves (46)  Johnny Rye (54)  Julie Mayberry (27)  John P. Carr (34)
Robin Lundstrum (87)  Steve Hollowell (49)  Richard McGrew (22)  Tony Furman (28)
Karilyn Brown (41)  Roger D. Lynch (14)  David Ray (40)  Rebecca Burkes (11)
Jack Fortner (99)  Les Warren (25)  Howard M. Beaty (9)  Mindy McAlindon (10)
94th General Assembly House Standing Committees: Class “B”

Aging, Children & Youth, Legislative & Military Affairs
This committee reviews matters pertaining to the levy, increase, reduction, collection, enforcement and administration of taxes and other revenue-producing measures, and considers resolutions germane to the subject matter of the committee. (House Rules 62.5)

Charlene Fite
Sonia Eubanks Barker
Aaron Pilkington
Julie Mayberry
Joy C. Springer
Rick McClure
Keith Brooks
Tony Furman
Matthew Brown
Hope Duke
Joey L. Carr
Zachary Gramlich
Stetson Painter
Matt Duffield
Steven Unger
Tara Shephard
Brit McKenzie
Jeremy Wooldridge
Trey Steimel
Shad Pearce

Agriculture, Forestry & Economic Development
This committee reviews matters pertaining to agriculture, livestock, forestry, industrial development, natural resources, oil and gas, publicity and parks, levee and drainage, rivers and harbors, similar legislation, and resolutions germane to the subject matter of the committee. (House Rules 62.7)

Matthew J. Shepherd
Bruce Cozart
Stephen Magie
Ron McNair
DeAnn Vaught
Jack Fortner
Austin McCollum
Steve Hollowell
Danny Watson
Roger D. Lynch
Carlton Wing
Denise Garner
Cameron Cooper
Harlan Breaux
Howard M. Beaty
Delia J. Haak
Brandon Achor
RJ Hawk
Kendra Moore
Chad Puryear

Insurance & Commerce
This committee reviews matters pertaining to banks and banking, savings and loan associations, stocks, bonds, other securities, securities dealers, insurance, public utilities, partnerships and corporations, home mortgage financing and housing, similar legislation and resolutions germane to the subject matter of the committee. (House Rules 62.9)

Jon S. Eubanks
Deborah Ferguson
Les Eaves
Jack Ladyman
Robin Lundstrum
Kenneth B. Ferguson
Vivian Flowers
Karliyn Brown
Fred Allen
John Maddox
Les Warren
Jim Wooten
Mark Perry
Lee Johnson
Jay Richardson
Brian S. Evans
Denise Ennett
Grant Hodges
Steven Walker
Ryan A. Rose

City, County & Local Affairs
This committee reviews matters pertaining to city and municipal affairs, county affairs, local improvement districts, interlocal government cooperation, similar legislation and resolutions germane to the subject matter of the committee. (House Rules 62.8)

Mike Holcomb
David Whitaker
Lanny Fite
Milton Nicks Jr.
Frances Cavanaugh
Johnny Rye
Carol Dalby
Stan Berry
Andrew Collins
Tippi McCullough
Richard McGrew
David Ray
Ashley Hudson
Wayne Long
Bart C. Schulz
Rebecca Burkes
Mindy McAlindon
R. Scott Richardson
DeAnna Hodges
Wade Andrews

State Agencies & Governmental Affairs
This committee reviews matters pertaining to state government and state agencies, except where the subject matter relates more appropriately to another committee, proposed amendments to the Constitution of the State of Arkansas or the federal government, election laws and procedures, federal and interstate relations, similar legislation, and resolutions germane to the subject matter of the committee. (House Rules 62.10)

Stephen Meeks
Lane Jean
Jeffrey Wardlaw
Josh Miller
Richard Womack
Mary Bentley
Dwight Tosh
Justin Gonzales
Rick Beck
Marcus E. Richmond
Jimmy Gazaway
Cindy Crawford
Jamie Scott
Nicole Clowney
Mark D. McElroy
Jon Milligan
John P. Carr
Kendon Underwood
Mark H. Berry
Jeremiah Moore
In Arkansas, cities and towns have the authority and flexibility to create laws designed specifically to meet their own unique needs. Local commissions and councils know their success often lies with the authority to solve local issues. This is done through a balance of effectiveness, innovation and common sense to create communities that residents are proud to call home.

Define It.

The people of Arkansas overwhelmingly support local control, yet the term isn’t recognized and understood by all. It is our job to explain it in a simple way. When people understand what local control means, they’re all for it. So, what is local control exactly? Local control is the right to address unique local needs with local solutions.

Localize It.

When it comes to local issues like neighborhood safety, street improvements, waste management or water quality, we turn to our city leaders. Why? Because Fort Smith is not Fordyce; Johnson is not Jonesboro. Local leaders—like you—are more connected to your residents’ needs and are better equipped to address them unlike state or federal officials.

Tailor It.

For Arkansas to succeed, we must build partnerships so that all Arkansans can benefit. When talking with lawmakers, ask them to leave local issues to local leadership. State lawmakers are better suited to tackle state issues. For example, establishing minimum water-quality standards is a complex issue affecting every resident in Arkansas. It needs to be addressed by state lawmakers, and the standards must be enforced by cities and towns. That’s a partnership between state and local government. Curbside garbage collection, however, is different for each neighborhood in each community. In these and countless other cases, local solutions work best.

Work With Your Legislators.

As the representatives for our cities and towns, we must be committed to creating a stronger partnership with state government and working collaboratively to benefit all Arkansans. The term local control resonates with all legislators. However, it doesn’t move the needle with some legislators as it should. This should not discourage us from our efforts to educate state leaders about local control and the impact of potentially harmful legislation. We must ask them to trust community leaders to do the jobs we were elected to do—solve local problems with local solutions. This partnership and sensible divide of responsibility will help make Arkansas the best it can be.

Here are a few tips to help you get started in working with your legislators:

1. Cultivate Relationships. You may know the common phrase “location, location, location” when it comes to real estate. Well, in politics it’s relationships, relationships, relationships! Get in touch with your legislators year-round, not just when they’re in session. The more you connect with them and share how you’re working to increase the quality of life for your residents, the more likely they will want to support your causes. Stay in touch with your legislators. Whether it’s a quick chat on the phone or sending a text message in response to an action alert, the more times you connect, the more support you will receive.

2. Be Prepared. To be successful, you must truly know the issues that you are contacting your legislator about. You must understand how a proposed bill will impact your community and clearly communicate this to your legislator. Be precise. Their time—and yours—is precious. Come prepared with real-life data and personalized stories to show local impact. Preparation also means understanding the legislative process. You can never assume their process and rules are the same as your own.

3. Make the Ask. When it comes to issues impacting your community, be specific in exactly what you want them to do. Is it lobbying a fellow lawmaker, voting a certain way or raising a question in committee? Never assume they will support your cause because you had a pleasant chat over coffee. Give them the opportunity to say “yes” to your request. Then hold them accountable throughout the whole process—while they campaign, including work done prior to and during sessions.

4. Show Appreciation. A brief, thoughtful thank you note goes a long way in building and solidifying relationships. Legislators are more likely to listen to you if you can find a way to genuinely praise them. Public recognition is a good thing, too. This kindness should be shared with their entire staff. Support staff can often be the gatekeepers to ensuring your meeting requests, information and phone calls get shared.
Local Control in Action.

Voters believe government is most effective and accountable at the local level. Research shows that voters see local officials as more attune to the values and views of the people in their communities. And, local democracy allows cities and towns to create policies that fit the unique needs of their communities. This is what local control is all about.

Having the right resources to help you educate your community members about the “Be Local. Be Heard.” initiative is essential, and the Arkansas Municipal League has developed a website filled with supporting tools and information. You can access these materials at BeLocalBeHeard.com.

Here are 10 key talking points and guidelines to help start the conversation about local control:

1. City councils and local governments know the value of their community and they listen to the people who live there. They listen or they don’t get re-elected.
2. Use terms like “local decision-making” and “local control.”
3. Make the message about the people, not about local officials. Voters strongly agree with the idea that “decisions made for our communities should be made by the people who make up that community.”
4. Use real-world examples that illustrate how preemption or “state interference” hurts people and their local communities, such as mandated leave time, presumption of illness and limiting building codes.
5. Voters view local government as their best opportunity to accomplish what matters to them.

6. As city leaders, it’s up to us to understand the values, beliefs and concerns of our residents.
7. Every city and town is different. What works in a big city might not work in a small town. This is why local government exists.
8. Don’t make state lawmakers the villains. Do reaffirm the purposes of local government.
9. Don’t use overheated references, such as “an attack on cities,” “assault on local democracy” or “cities under siege.” Voters believe that if the threat was so bad, they would have heard about it.
10. Don’t make this a partisan issue. People believe corporations and special interests are influencing state politicians to act—not just Republicans or Democrats. They do not see this as a partisan strategy.

Visit BeLocalBeHeard.com for downloadable assets, including print materials, video and radio spots, and social media graphics, like the one pictured below.