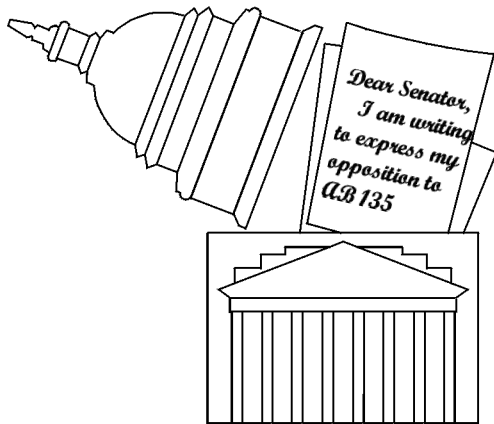




Legislative Action Guide



- ★How to monitor legislation
- ★The Inner Workings Disclosed
- ★Anatomy of a Bill
- ★How to write to your legislators
- ★Roster of the State Assembly and Senate for the 1999-2000 Session
- ★How to identify your representatives
- ★How a bill becomes a law

Monitoring Legislation on the Internet by Paige Smith

The CHN Legislative Monitoring Committee watches proposed legislation as it works its way through the legislature in order to keep you informed about bills that might affect us as homeschoolers. However, for those of you who would rather get your information directly from the source, here's how.

The California and federal legislatures publish bills on the Internet as they are introduced, and provide tools that allow us to sort through them, read them, and track bills of interest to us. We are able to stay informed and can take action when needed without being dependent on outside "experts." If you'd like to do some of this research for yourself, all you need is a computer, a modem, a web browser, access to the Internet, and some keywords or bill numbers to use in your search. Once at a web site, finding legislation, or information about legislators, etc. is a matter of clicking on highlighted text or icons. My favorite California site, hands down, is the Senate site, because it is clear and uncluttered, easy to read, well-organized, and it works, so the rest of this article will focus on using the Senate site. If you want to know about a particular Assembly Member, though, you'll need to go to the Assembly site and click on his/her name under "Member Directory."

When you arrive at the California Senate web site, you will find a page full of opportunities to see what's new at the site, read about the Senate leadership, look at Senator home pages, and yes, read/search legislation and find out when bills of interest to you will be heard in committee and on the floor of the Assembly and Senate. You can also read the full text of the California Codes and search through them by number or keyword, same as you can with legislation. Just click on the highlighted text and you're on your way.

The California legislature introduces an astounding number of bills each year - more than the federal legislature does - and only a fraction of these bills might impact homeschooling in some way. What we need is a sorting process that will bring up the "bad guys" without bringing too many others along with them, and that's where the keywords come into play. During the past few years we've learned

as Chris Cardiff says, that "devising efficient and effective search filters is more of an art than a science," and have used that knowledge to refine our keyword list. (See sidebar.) Once you have a list of bills to look at, you can read them online or download them to read later. To skim a bill, simply search through the text of the bill by the keyword(s) that brought it up and you'll get a fair idea of what it's about. Then for bills that warrant the extra time, you can do a careful "word-for-word" reading. If after reading it carefully, the bill still bothers you, a quick call to the author's office to find out why the bill was introduced may be in order, and you might want to check with the Legislation Monitoring Committee, too.

As bills go through the leg process, they are amended, some many times, and we can keep track of the amendments on the web too. Amended versions are posted with their amendment dates at the site, plus the Senate will help you track them if you wish. You can "subscribe" to the bill and the Senate Daily News Service will send you the bill's status, history, text, voting results and amended text all by email anytime there's a change.

The Web Sites

California Assembly: <http://www.assembly.ca.gov>

California Senate: <http://www.sen.ca.gov>

California Legislation: <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov> (Search CA legislation and the California Codes)

Federal: <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.html> (Search for federal bills, read the Congressional Record, etc.)

