

DECODING THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS IN NEW JERSEY: AN INSIDER'S VIEW FROM NJOTA

The legislative process in any state, including New Jersey, can seem like a labyrinth to the uninitiated. However, the New Jersey Occupational Therapy Association (NJOTA) has mapped out a step-by-step guide to understanding this process in layman's terms, from identifying gaps in current statutes to the final enactment of a bill into law. This guide aims to provide a simplified overview of the legislative timeline from the perspective of NJOTA.

Step 1: Identifying the Need

The first step in the legislative process is recognizing gaps within the current statutes and issues raised by constituents that are impacting Occupational Therapy (OT) consumers. A needs assessment is drafted to survey the key populations, providing justification and evidence for the need for legislative change.

Step 2: Consultation with Lobbyists

At this stage, the organization reaches out to its lobbyists for a deeper understanding of the political environment and the optimal time to push toward finding a sponsor for the proposed legislation. The lobbyist guides the organization and aids in making a connection with potential sponsors, leveraging their expertise and political connections.

Step 3: Securing a Sponsor

Once the organization has the necessary resources (i.e., history of statute issues within NJ, evidence for justification of changes, etc.), the lobbyist or the organization reaches out to potential sponsor staff for a meeting. The objective is to secure a sponsor to champion the proposed legislative changes. The legislator that becomes the sponsor will request, via the Office of Legislative Services, a non-partisan agency, to draft and provide assistance in getting the bill written into the proper technical form. During this time, the sponsor may seek co-sponsors for increased support (Office of Legislative Services, 2020).

Step 4: First Reading

Once prepared, the bill is introduced to the Senate or Assembly by its sponsor during a session. The Senate Secretary or Assembly Clerk reads the bill's title, marking its first reading. At this stage, the bill becomes available to the public online. At this point, the bill can be commented on via verbal or written commentary throughout the entire legislative process (Disabilities Rights New Jersey, 2021).

Step 5: Committee Review

The bill may then be referred to a committee for review. Alternatively, it could be sent directly into a second reading. If referred, the committee will consider the bill at an open public meeting. The committee decides if the bill is reported as is, with amendments, or by a substitute bill. This process may go back and forth until a consensus is reached (Office of Legislative Services, n.d.).

Step 6: Second Reading

Next, the bill is reported to the floor. During the second reading, the bill's title is read aloud again. The bill is eligible for amendments during this step, allowing for further refinement before it advances (Office of Legislative Services, 2020).

Step 7: Third Reading and Vote

The Speaker or President schedules a third reading. During this third reading, the bill is posted for a vote, and members can debate the bill. The bill passes when it receives a majority vote of the members (41 votes in the Assembly and 21 votes in the Senate). The bill is then delivered to the second House and undergoes the same process of amendments as the first bill. If amendments are made, it will bounce back through the first House until the bill passes in both Houses in identical form (Office of Legislative Services, n.d.).

Step 8: Review by the Governor

Once both houses approve, the bill is sent to the Governor for review. The Governor has the power to sign it, conditionally veto it (returning it to the Houses for changes), or issue an absolute veto. If vetoed, a bill can still become law if a 2/3 vote overrides the veto (Office of Legislative Services, n.d.).

Step 9: Enactment into Law

If the Governor signs the bill, it becomes law on a specified date or, if unspecified, on the following July 4th. Upon enactment, the OT Advisory Council must update the Regulations to reflect the new statutes (Office of Legislative Services, n.d.).

By understanding this legislative timeline, one can gain a more profound appreciation of the complex process involved in lawmaking. This knowledge can empower individuals and organizations to become more engaged in the legislative process, leading to more informed and effective advocacy for necessary changes in law and policy.

Please scan the QR Code below for references.



