



JUST DO IT!

A First Timer's Guide to the Legislative Process in Florida's Capital City

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OK, this year you are going to do it.

You have heard FHCA Executive Director Emmett Reed ask you to do it. You have heard FHCA Presidents Deborah Franklin, David Sylvester, Dion Sena, Kelley Rice-Schild, and many before them, ask you to do it. You have heard FHCA Legislative Committee Chairs Scott Allen, Ben Carotenuto, James Reiss, Mark Daniels, and Kelley Rice-Schild ask you to do it. You have heard your FHCA staff and lobbyists ask you to do it. But you have never done it? *What is it?* It's asking you to lobby your state legislators and make them aware of our position on an issue.

But why have you hung back and let others do your lobbying for you? Maybe because it's something new and unknown and that can always make us anxious. Maybe because someone else would always do it. Maybe because you think the legislator will know more than you do. Maybe because . . .

Every one of you is good at what you do because you do it every day. You know how to run your facility because you do it every day. You know how to hire good employees because you do it every day. You know how to deal with emergency situations and how to negotiate situations because you do it every day. But meeting with a state legislator is not something you do every day, and so it becomes harder to do. And if that meeting is in the state Capitol building, it puts you in an environment that often makes you feel like "a fish out of water."

So let's fix that right now. I am going to help you understand the legislative process in Tallahassee, navigate around the hallways, and feel more comfortable amidst all the lobbyists, Blackberrys, and power players that abound in the Capitol. Ready for fun? Let's go!

Why You Are Here

First of all, you have to know why you are here. You are here to get a message across to your legislator. Legislators are, by and large, very willing to provide constituent service, that is, to do you a favor which may translate into a more secure incumbency for themselves. Your job is to make it as easy as possible for them to help you. You have to know what you want. FHCA staff are available to discuss issues with you and let you know what is needed from the legislator. It might be a yes or no vote on a particular bill, or support of an amendment to a bill, or support of an issue that is not attached to a bill but important to you. **Whatever it is, you must know what you want before you begin your journey.** Your meeting with your legislator may be in a restaurant, an office or even in the hallway so you must be clear and direct on exactly what you want. You may have 5 minutes or 15 minutes. You may have quiet or dozens of interruptions. So state what you want, why you want it, leave your written material, and card, and say thank you. You have now begun your journey.

But getting there is half the fun! Did I say fun? Yes, the legislative process is fun. From the uphill walk from the FHCA Office to the Capitol (remember, it's downhill coming back!) to the mazes in the office buildings, you are going to learn your way. Speaking of getting there--if you are driving, be aware that there is no public parking at the Capitol. A short walk away, just behind City Hall (corner of S. Adams & Jefferson), very close to the Capitol, is Klemm Plaza, which has public parking beneath. You can enter the Klemm Plaza parking garage from Duval Street or Bronough Street.

What Not To Wear

One thing you will notice early on is that fashion usually gives way to comfort. Regarding those marble floors--wear comfortable shoes. You will be standing and walking on the hardest surface ever produced. Places to sit are hard to find. Your feet will hurt--that's a promise. It's hard to be compelling and convincing when your feet hurt. The other comfort issue is to bring everything you will need, but only what you need. That extra book for down times and paperwork from the office will get very heavy as the day drags on. And pockets are always important to be able to quickly retrieve your business cards and a pen.

The Lay of the Land

As you approach the Capitol complex you will notice a very tall (22 floors) building in the middle. That is called the Capitol Building. It contains offices for a variety of state functions and that is where the action is. Don't get it confused with the Historic Capitol which is a separate building across the Plaza

(that open area in the center of the Capitol complex) which now houses an interesting history of our state government. Directly at the ends of the Plaza, and forming the sides of a box with the old and new Capitol buildings are the House Office Building (on the north side closest to Jefferson Street) and the Senate Office Building (on the south side closest to Madison Street). There are elevators in each building as well as stairs for those of you who have not walked all day.

When you look at your legislative directory, you will see that some legislative offices and committee meeting rooms have HB (House Building) or SB (Senate Building). The first number of the office will tell you the floor of the building (i.e., 234 SB is on the second floor of the Senate Building). You will also see that some of the offices and committee meeting rooms are designated C or Capitol. So, Room 407 C is on the fourth floor of the Capitol. You will also notice that some of the legislators' offices are high numbers, such as 1102 C. This means you will have to take the elevator to the 11th floor of the Capitol building. The Capitol elevators serve different floors, so look before you get on. One group of elevators goes from P - 5. Some are LL - 19, and another group is LL - 22 (incidentally, there is an observation area on the 22nd floor).

If you have difficulty locating a particular office, ask someone to direct you or show you how to get around. Once you get to an office identified by its number on the outside, visible from the central hallway, you may still have to keep looking. Often legislators share offices--anywhere from two to ten in an

area, so if you are in a multiple office suite, you will probably encounter a messy looking jumble of desks and doorways. There will seem to be no logical traffic pattern. You will have to follow the wall signs which are usually grey and white. Do not feel inadequate. Many areas are spacious, many areas are crowded, and you will see all sorts. Ask for directions from one of the secretaries, or anyone else you can find. You may need to ask several people. Don't feel discouraged. Stay cheerful. Stay positive. Stay grateful for every bit of assistance. You never know who the giver of directions may turn out to be. And once you learn your way around, please share with other rookies!

Also, there are connecting walkways from the HB to the Capitol to the SB. You can cross over from the HB to the Capitol to the SB on the plaza level (outside), and on the second and third floors. On the fourth floor you can also cross from the Capitol to the Senate, but not the House. There is also a walkway from the second floor of the Capitol to the fourth floor of the Knott Building, which now houses many of the Senate's legislative and committee staff and is where many committee meetings are held.

Comfort Food

Now let's talk about the Capitol. This building starts on the parking level, P. You will probably never have a need to go to the parking level (remember, it's not public parking). The next level is called LL, Lower Level. This level is important; it is where the Cafeteria is located, which is open for breakfast and lunch, until 2 p.m. You can see anyone from Capitol staff to lobbyists to

legislators to the press filling up on biscuits, grits, and some of the best southern fried chicken and southern cooked vegetables that you can find anywhere. There are also sandwiches, pizza and other cold food. It's always a good meeting spot. For lighter fare, there is a snack bar on the tenth floor of the Capitol Building that is open until 4:00 p.m. And, if you just want to read or enjoy some quiet, stop by the library on the seventh floor. You can't eat here, but you can read newspapers from around the state and even use a computer if you have a disk with you. If you really want quiet, visit the Chapel on the Plaza Level around the corner from the State Seal, described below.

The Great Seal of Florida

Up on the next level is the Plaza Level (PL) and this is where, for security reasons, you must enter the building from the outside. It is also where you will find the Great Seal of the State of Florida as well as the offices for the Executive Branch of our government. Usually during session there is a display in the area around the Seal, and you can often get information, or be entertained by one group or another. There is also an information desk on the west side of this level with free literature on Florida attractions, parks, and other general information. Also on the west side is a second security entrance. You can also, on most days, enter the separate House and Senate office buildings, through a similar security system. Folks often just use the Capitol entrance for convenience and location.

Going up you will pass the second and third floors and if you get off on either floor, you can look down on the Seal--just don't lean too far over the railing!

Lobbyists in Action

Next stop is the famous fourth floor. You have all seen this floor on television or in the newspaper. This is the hub of activity during session. On this floor is the main entrance for legislators to the House and Senate. It is also the gathering place for the hundreds of lobbyists who are working on their issues, talking on their cellular phones, and watching House and Senate floor action on the big screen TVs at either end of the rotunda (middle) area. Best of all is the friendly woman working behind the wooden counter who will help you with daily calendars, journals (text of what happened the day before), floor seating charts, committee lists and any other general information you might need. Don't be afraid to ask for anything because she has heard it all before. She can direct you to the nurse's station if you are not feeling well, help you get a bill or amendment that you might need, or show you where to make a photocopy. You can't miss the counter; much of it is laden with briefcases lined up while their owners "work the door" of each chamber. Working the door means standing outside the door waiting to see a legislator about an issue. If you want to see your Representative, just write a note and give it to the folks at the designated area behind the 4th floor desk counter who will turn it over to a page for delivery. Then you must wait, possibly for a long time, for the legislator to come out. When they do, you must be right there to call to them and concisely state your business. Be sure to say thanks. And if you think your legislator is too busy to step out and talk to you, take the elevator to the fifth floor, go to the viewing gallery and see why a chance to escape the hectic pace

may be very desirable. The Senate does not offer such a message service.

The Gallery

The last stop on the Capitol elevator is the fifth floor with all its treasures. As you step off, you can go to the House viewing gallery on the left which contains a large viewing area that is off the House floor. Upon entering either Senate or House chamber, you must pass through a metal detector, like the ones in the airport for security reasons, because there is no glass between the gallery and the chamber. You will be able to hear everything that is said on the floor and they will be able to hear you, so turn off your phone and keep your feet off the chairs and on the floor. In both viewing galleries there is reserved space for legislators' spouses, and often areas are kept reserved for visiting groups; but sit wherever you want and if you do sit in a reserved space, one of the pages will politely ask you to move. Don't worry about it, we have all done it and it happens every day. You will notice that you cannot see all the legislators from any one spot so you might want to look around before you decide just where you want to sit. You can stay in either gallery as long as you want. Both chambers record all votes on the "board" and will tell you what bill they are on so you can follow along in the daily calendar. Don't leave the fifth floor until you tour the area behind the bank of phones that you saw when you came off the elevator. The Sprint Service Center contains incoming and outgoing fax machines, a copy machine, televisions showing House and Senate floor action, rooms for telephone conference calls, a complimentary local phone, office supplies and sodas and snacks (donations accepted). It's an office away

from the office. And before you leave the fifth floor, be sure to look over the railing and watch all the lobbyists at work down on the 4th floor--it's quite entertaining.

Who's Who

So now you know your message, and you have found your way around the buildings—let's talk about what you are seeing and what people are doing because if you are like any first timer, it all sounds very foreign.

The 120 members of the House are lead by the Speaker who is addressed as Mr. Speaker. He presides over the House chamber from the Speaker's rostrum which is the highest point on the floor in recognition of the great importance accorded the Speakers. In his absence the House is led by the Speaker Pro Tempore. The party with the most members has a leader called the Majority Leader who organizes, controls, supervises and provides leadership to the party's House members. The party with fewer members is led by the Minority Leader who is expected to actively articulate the party's viewpoint on the House floor during sessions. Both leaders are very influential in the legislative process. Seating in the House Chamber is determined by the Speaker. The Majority Leader and the Speaker Pro Tempore occupy seats on the front row at the center aisle. Directly below the Speaker's rostrum is the Clerk's desk. This is where bills and amendments are read to the House and where votes are recorded. The Clerk of the House has two main tasks. One is to assist the leaders and the members of the House to understand the detailed process by which laws are enacted; the other is to record the history of that

process in an accurate manner. The Sergeant at Arms, under the direction of the Speaker, is responsible for the maintenance of order in the Chamber, the lobby, and adjoining rooms, and for seeing that no person is admitted to the Chamber unless entitled to that privilege. Only legislators and essential staff are allowed in the Chamber during sessions.

The 40 members of the Senate are lead by the President who is addressed as Mr. President. He presides over the Senate chamber in the same manner as the House Speaker. It's important to remember "once a Senator, always a Senator" so always use the title with current and former Senators. The Senate has a President Pro Tempore and Majority and Minority Leaders just like the House. The Secretary of the Senate (currently the first woman ever is serving in that position) is comparable to the Clerk of the House and the Senate also has its own Sergeant at Arms. The President of the Senate occupies the "chair" at the rostrum, pacing the flow of legislation, deciding who will speak, and ruling on parliamentary disputes. The President will frequently call on other members to preside while he works out the details of legislative proposals. If he wishes to debate an issue before the Senate, he will vacate the chair and speak from his regular desk on the floor. Just above the President's rostrum is the screen used to welcome groups of visitors watching from the gallery. In front of the President's rostrum is the Secretary's "desk," which is staffed by the Secretary of the Senate. Clerks at this desk read the bills and amendments before the body and record Senate actions. The seating arrangement in the chamber is determined by district number. The only exceptions are for the

Chairman of the Rules and Calendar Committee, the President Pro Tempore and the Majority and Minority Leaders who sit in the first two rows on the center aisle. Only Senators and designated staff members can enter the chamber during session. All men in the chamber must wear coats and ties.

In the rear of both chambers is a small meeting room often referred to as the "bubble." It is where small groups of legislators can go to discuss issues rather than distracting others on the floor. Often the discussions can get very heated! Both chambers also have areas designated for members of the press and for staff to operate sound and video equipment. A local television station carries live legislative action, and public television replays the highlights later in the evening.

I'm Just a Bill

The working draft of a legislative proposal is called a "bill." Once an idea is developed, it is given to bill drafting where the bill is put in the proper form for introduction. All House bills have odd numbers and all Senate bills have even numbers. Some bills begin in committees as working documents and so they begin as PCBs (Proposed Committee Bill). They have numbers that identify them (i.e., PCB-HQ-09-04 means the legislation is a proposed committee bill from the House Health Quality Committee during the 2009 Legislative Session and is the fourth bill developed by the committee). Once the committee has finished its discussion of a proposed committee bill, it is voted out of the committee and is assigned a regular number for the rest of the session. Bills filed by individual legislators are numbered based on when

they came out of bill drafting. Every time a bill is amended in committee, it gets another CS (committee substitute) added to its title so you will see HB 23, and CS/CS/HB 47 and even CS/CS/CS/CS/SB 214--it just depends on how many times a bill is amended in committee. Once a bill passes all the committees it has been referred to at the time it was introduced, and usually a fiscal committee is the bill's last stop, it will be sent to the floor. The Rules Chairman of each Chamber determines the order of bills to be heard on the floor. All bills must be read three times on the floor of the chamber. Bills are read the first time for introduction, the second time for amendments, and the third time for a final vote, except that bills can be amended on third reading with a two-thirds vote of the members. When bills pass the chamber they are put into messages and sent to the other chamber. Bills can go back and forth in messages many times during a session. They must then be referred to committee, be heard if needed or withdrawn and read on the floor. If the House and Senate bills differ, because you need a bill in each chamber to get legislation passed, then one of the chambers must agree to the changes of the other or they will never pass. Not agreeing to the amendments of the other chamber is a tactic often used to show one of the chambers feels strongly that its version is the best. There is always the possibility that a Conference Committee could be appointed which is composed of members of both houses appointed by the presiding officers to work out an acceptable compromise. This is always done with the budget, but rarely used on other issues. Once bills are passed by both chambers, they become engrossed

and are sent to the Governor. If the Governor signs the bill, it is enrolled.

If you want to venture out on your own for copies of bills, amendments and lots of other information materials, you can start at Room 304 Capitol, which is along the hallway as you approach the walkway to the Senate from the Capitol on the third floor. Copies of Senate bills and color directories of the Senate can be obtained here as well as committee packages showing all the bills and amendments a particular committee will take up that day. You can also get copies of lots of other materials--just ask what is available. For House bills go to Room 334 Capitol (Duplicating Office) which is around the corner from the rotunda area on the third floor of the Capitol. Copies of House bills and other information material can be obtained here along with floor amendments. Also remember that you have access to a lot of information from the state's official website, *On-Line Sunshine*, such as statutes, bills, and legislator information, at <http://www.leg.state.fl.us/>.

What is "Session"?

Each regular legislative session is designated to last 60 consecutive days, and begins on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in March. The only exception is every 10 years during reapportionment when session begins in January. In past years the session has been extended many times, but always ends on the last day with the traditional dropping of the handkerchiefs by the House and Senate Sergeants at Arms in the center of the fourth floor rotunda in the Capitol (called sine die). This is a popular sight and one worth watching at least once.

So now you know how to get there, what to say, and what you expect to see so the mystery remains no more. In fact, you may find that it's actually fun and once the legislative bug gets into your blood, you may find it's hard to lose! It's also serious business because the future of long term care is in the hands of our elected leaders. I hope these tips will make it a little bit easier for you. Remember, it can take years of visits before you feel the maximum benefit from your visit, and knowledge and comfort are built slowly with each visit, and each visit gets a little more productive and effective and easier. So come to Tallahassee--I'll be glad to show you around. And this year,

Just Do It!