

HOW TO KILL A BILL

You need to take whatever actions necessary to make this bill fall into the category with the two thirds that never make it. There are myriad ways to kill bills.

Because of the volume of work legislators have each session and the time constraints they work under, the bills they pass are usually those that are well executed, clear, and broadly supported, or those with lots of political muscle behind them. With extra work, even these bills can be killed.

Timing is important. The earlier you can stop a bill, the less resources you will have to expend, and the less time will be diverted from the important job of passing your own bill.

Certain reactions work best at different points in the bill's progress. Here are some methods and suggestions on the most effective timing.

I. You learn the bill will be introduced.

- Contact the sponsor; ask who requested the bill, and what they hope it will accomplish. State your opposition, and say why you oppose it.
- Gather information that will prove the bill is not necessary; will result in strong opposition; will be costly to administer.

II. The bill is introduced.

- Prepare an alternative bill and urge the sponsor to replace his with yours.
- Warn your troops of an impending fight.

III. Bill is assigned to committee.

- Contact the committee chair to state your opposition, and offer your alternative bill again.
- Prepare for the hearing; plan your strategy.
- Contact (phone or in person) all members of the committee to state your opposition to the bill, and provide information to any who are interested.
- All members of your group (the troops) should contact the committee members from their district to ask that they vote against the bill.

IV. Hearing is scheduled.

- Plan who will attend, and prepare testimony for each witness. Bring sufficient copies of the information for each committee member, the committee secretary, and any press people at the hearing.
- Prepare a press release to issue immediately after the hearing. It should state your group's opposition to the bill and some pertinent reasons.
- Your testimony should be planned to cast doubt on any supposed benefits claimed for this bill. You want to show widespread opposition (ideally including from the government branch named in the bill to enforce its provisions). Effective arguments include: bill would cost too much money to enforce; enforcement would be difficult, or discriminatory; bill would be harmful to a particular group such as the elderly, handicapped, children, farmers, etc. (use your imagination, but do not fabricate); bill is confusing, unclear, vague, open to misinterpretation; bill will impact on small towns, or on rural areas, etc. If all else fails, attempt to have the bill referred to interim study. If the bill offends you only in part, prepare an amendment to deal with that part and present it at the hearing.

V. Committee passes the bill.

- Check the date the bill is scheduled for floor action.
- If the committee vote was not unanimous, will a person from the losing side file a minority report or speak against the bill during floor action?
- Ask a friendly legislator to remove the bill from the Consent Calendar, and lead a floor fight against the bill.
- Distribute fact sheets to all house members, outlining briefly the strongest points against this bill. Try to have the fact sheets delivered to each house member's assigned seat, or if that is not possible, distribute them as the members file into the house the day the bill is scheduled for debate.
- Issue press releases to follow up on earlier release. This release should urge citizens to ask their legislators to vote against the bill.
- Attempt to include other groups in your opposition, and urge them to make their position public.
- All people who have any interest in this bill should contact their own legislators and urge them to vote against the bill.

You and your supporters should be visibly present in the state house the day your bill is debated. An effective ploy to call attention to your presence without giving offense is to have each supporter wear the same insignia. For example, you might all wear arm-bands printed with the logo "Responsible Dog Owner". Do not sport tee shirts emblazoned with "I love my dog". This is serious business; do not appear frivolous or antagonistic.

VI. Bill passes and is sent to the other house.

- Return to step III and retrace your steps. Do not give up. The game is far from over.
- Bills are heard first in whichever house they are introduced (House bills start in the House, Senate bills in the Senate). Often there will be diminished enthusiasm in the second house, especially if the bill was opposed in the first. Negative momentum will be on your side, if you do not give up too soon. When is too soon? Any time before the bill is defeated.

VII. Bill passes second house and is sent to the governor.

- Meet with the governor and urge him to veto the bill, or if that seems to be politically inexpedient, to re-refer the bill for further study to the originating committee.
- Continue to issue regular press releases listing arguments against the bill and asking citizens' help in urging the governor to veto it.
- Utilize local radio talk shows to spread support for your side, as with press releases.
- Request your legislative friends contact the governor and ask him to veto the bill. Pocket vetoes are less politically risky for the governor, since they are not confrontational.