

HOW TO READ LEGISLATIVE BILLS:

By Jose Borrajero

One very important skill for citizen activists/lobbyists to have is the ability to read, understand, and render opinions on legislative bills, but... When asked to read those bills, most people experience a reaction similar to that of Dracula when he is shown a cross. Total freak out would be an understatement. But it doesn't have to be that way. Following these steps will make the task a lot easier.

1. Go to the AZ legislature's website at www.azleg.gov
2. If you already know the bill number(s) of the bill(s) you are interested in, then skip to step 7 below. Otherwise continue on to step 3.
3. Click on the "bills" pull down menu. Choose "bill info"
4. The screen that appears contains all the bills introduced during the current session, arranged according to whether they are House or Senate bills. They are also arranged in numerical order and bundled in 50 bill units.
5. Right above the heading labeled HOUSE BILLS, you will see the search engine window. Enter key word(s). What comes up is a list of bills that deal with your subject. You may have to do a little trial and error to find the exact bill you are looking for.
6. Click on the bill number for the bill you are interested in, and go on to step 8 below.
7. On the upper right-hand section of the main page, enter the bill number for the bill you wish to work with (e.g. SB1123, HB2025, etc.).
8. The page that appears contains a lot of material, including a six-option dropdown menu, with the option "Overview" chosen by default.
9. Click on the "Documents" option. Under "Bill Versions" choose the latest version
10. The screen that appears contains the full text of the statute that the bill seeks to modify. Keep in mind that with very rare exceptions, legislative bills do not create new laws, but modify existing laws by deleting text and/or adding text.
11. The text ~~to be deleted is shown in red with strikethrough~~. The text **TO BE ADDED IS SHOWN IN BLUE AND ALL CAPITALS**. The portions of the law marked in this fashion are the only portions that we need to be concerned with. The rest of the law remains intact, so we need not spend time and effort reading it except as a means to better understand the impact of the proposed changes.

Fortunately, in the vast majority of cases, the task is not any more complicated than going through the steps outlined in items 1-11 above. The task does become quite a bit more daunting when the proposed changes entail references to multiple statutes because this requires going back and forth between the referred statute(s) and the current bill. This can be confusing and frustrating, but becomes less so with practice.

Try it, you may like it