



ADVOCATE TOOLKIT

HOW TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Our kids. Our schools. Our future.



Index

Welcome	1
Raise Your Voice	2
How to Contact Your Legislator	3
Tips for Making a Difference	6
Background	7
Additional Tools	16



Welcome

Thank you for taking the first step to becoming an advocate. ISTA has compiled this Advocate Toolkit to encourage you to take your advocacy further to support traditional, community public schools.

Being an advocate for public schools goes beyond politics. It means supporting and advocating for policies that benefit the students, educators and communities, all of whom rely on strong public schools. By becoming an advocate, you stand with the more than 90 percent of Hoosier families that choose community public schools.

Advocates like you make a difference in the Indiana Statehouse every year. Education advocates are responsible for thousands of emails, phone calls, one-on-one conversations and other contacts with legislators each year. Building on top of these past successes will help further our advocacy goals for public schools.

By using this toolkit and staying connected to news and updates from ISTA during the legislative session, you can, and will, make an impact for public school students and educators. In connecting and building a relationship with your legislator, you can help our community public schools with issues like increased funding and ending education reforms and experimentation that are failing our kids.

What Are We Advocating For?

- **Implement competitive and attractive pay.**
- **Improve learning and working conditions.**
- **Increase educator voice, respect and professional autonomy.**
- **Inspire and prepare the next generation of educators.**

Find ISTA's full legislative agenda at ista-in.org/leg-platform.

Thank you for your dedication to our kids, our schools and our future.



Raise Your Voice

Telling your story makes the most impact in communicating with legislators and other policymakers. In addition, telling them how a certain issue impacts you or your community brings the issue to life. We encourage you to use the messages below, tailoring them to your own experience, when talking about your support for public schools.

Solving Indiana's Educator Shortage Crisis

- Too many students are in schools where decision-makers have driven away quality educators by failing to provide adequate funding for competitive salaries and support, disrespecting the profession, and placing extraordinary pressure on individual educators to do more and more with less and less.
- Too many potential educators never go into the classroom in part because of low starting salaries and record wage gaps between teaching and professions that require similar education – gaps that get worse over the course of educators' careers.
- One too many lawmakers are failing students and parents by attacking educators and making it harder for them to prepare students to succeed in our increasingly complex and diverse society.
- Educators know what works to ensure students are prepared for the challenges and opportunities ahead; they need supportive administrations, protected planning time, mental health supports, and fully-funded and safe schools that allow kids to thrive.
- Every child needs and deserves a neighborhood school with well-prepared educators, class sizes with one-on-one attention, and enough nurses, counselors, and healthy meals to ensure they can thrive.
- Short-term gimmicks, one-time bonuses, and lowering standards to teach can't fix the underlying problems that we can and must solve so kids get the quality education they need to prepare for their future.
- Ensuring every school in Indiana has the staff students need to be safe and cared for is a twofold challenge: to recruit large numbers of new and diverse educators into the profession and retain the qualified educators who are being pushed out of the classroom.
- Key policy measures that address both recruitment and retention include: improving working conditions, increasing pay and benefits, and increasing respect and professional autonomy.
- Lawmakers need to commit to providing adequate resources and the funding our schools need and to addressing funding gaps between low- and high-income schools so ALL students have a fair opportunity to succeed.



How to Contact Your Legislator



Call Your Legislator

Contact the House and Senate by phone at **800-382-9841 (House)** and **800-382-9467 (Senate)**.

- The switchboard will direct you to the legislative assistant of your legislator.
- Leave a message that specifies the bill(s) and your position, and ask your legislator to call you back.
- Don't be discouraged if you do not receive a call back. The number of contacts made on a particular bill are tracked by their assistants. That helps them understand what bills have community concern or support.

What to Say

- Identify yourself by name.
- Explain why you are calling: "I am calling to support/oppose HB____/SB____."
- Be polite and concise. Developing one or two brief talking points will focus the content of your message. Too much information may confuse your message.
- Ask your legislator his/her position on this issue. Don't assume that your legislator has prior knowledge of your issue. Be calm and respectful, and be prepared to educate, using local examples to accentuate your point. If the legislator requires further information, provide it as soon as possible.
- Thank your legislator or the person who took your message for their time and consideration.



Write Your Legislator

Find your legislator's email and mailing address by using our tool at ista-in.org/our-advocacy.

- Address your legislator "Dear Representative/Senator (Last Name)"
- Be specific. Your purpose for writing should be stated in the first paragraph of the letter. If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, be sure to identify its full name and number, e.g. House Bill: HB____, Senate Bill: SB____. Try to send your letter while the issue is still under consideration.
- State your position. Explain why you support or oppose this issue. Keep in mind that your personal, local examples concerning the impact of this legislation are most powerful. Be courteous and to the point, keeping your letter focused on one issue.
- Ask for a response. Indicate to your legislator that you would appreciate a reply containing his/her position on the issue. "Sincerely yours" is a proper way to conclude your letter.
- Follow up. If you agree with your legislator's vote, take the time to let him/her know that. Similarly, if you disagree with his or her vote, inform your legislator.



FIND YOUR LEGISLATOR

Find who represents you in the Statehouse. Connect with your legislator to advocate for what's best for our kids, our schools and our future.

SEARCH



Indiana
State
Teachers
Association

Find Your Elected Officials

Enter your home address information to find and contact your elected officials

Street Address

Postal Code

Find Your Officials



Attend Local Events

- When you attend a meeting, be polite as you talk to legislators about important issues and bills (if it is not in their committee, they may need to be educated) and their voting intentions.
- Take pictures of all the educators who attended with you.
- Try to get a picture with your senator or representative.
- Post your pictures to social media. Tag ISTA on Twitter and Instagram @ISTAmembers or @IndianaStateTeachers on Facebook so that we can share your post.



Tips for Making a Difference



Do Your Homework

Understand your issue, and make sure it's a state concern. Don't contact a state legislator about federal or local issues, but instead, focus on issues where a legislator has influence and impact. Whenever possible, cite a specific bill or law as the focus of your communication. The more specific you are, the more impact you will have. Don't hesitate to contact ISTA to discuss the issues you care about.



Use Personal Experience

To address a problem with state government or a possible solution, describe in your own words how this problem affects you and how the solution might help resolve your concerns. If there are possible negative ramifications to your approach, it's best to tell the legislator of those potential problems before the legislator is asked to help resolve the issue. Don't surprise your legislator by giving him or her only half the story.



As Much as Possible, Be Timely

Follow the news media or the ISTA blog (ista-in.org/blog) so you understand when the General Assembly is in session and when it is likely that issues will be addressed. The most effective communication is one which arrives early in the legislative process, preferably at the committee level where most of the work is done on legislation. Sometimes issues do arise late into the session and require immediate attention.



Never Threaten

There is no quicker way to ensure your opinion will not count than to threaten legislators with reprisal if they do not vote the way you wish them to vote. Be fair and firm, but use your people skills.



Choose the Best Way to Reach a Legislator

Use common sense as to which method is most appropriate. Generally, writing a letter or sending an email is the preferred means of communication. A letter to your own district legislator is more effective than contacting legislators from other parts of the state.



Maintain a Relationship

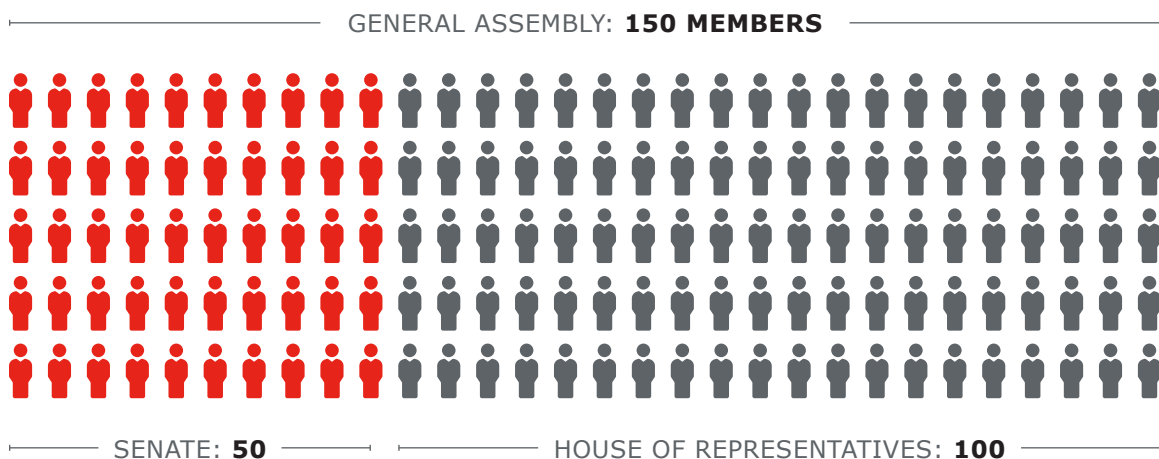
The best way to get a legislator's attention is to develop a friendship. It's especially helpful if you contact your legislator from time to time with a good word or some update on your classroom or personal ventures, rather than just contacting your legislator when you have troubles.



Background

What is the Indiana General Assembly?

Indiana's legislature is made up of 100 members in the House of Representatives and 50 members in the Senate. Together, they are known as the General Assembly. The General Assembly meets for four months in odd-numbered years (long session) and two and a half months in even-numbered years (short session).



The 150 members of the General Assembly are elected by the citizens of the districts in which they live. Every two years, all 100 representatives are elected to two-year terms. Although senators are elected to four-year terms, half of the 50 senators are elected every two years.

To hold a seat in the General Assembly, a person must meet certain qualifications. You must be:

- A citizen of the **United States**
- An Indiana resident for at least **two years**
- A citizen of the district for at least **one year**
- At least **21 years of age** to serve in the House of Representatives
- At least **25 years of age** to serve in the Senate



House of Representatives

The House of Representatives is located on the third floor of the Statehouse. A viewing gallery is available above the chamber on the fourth floor.

House members have offices throughout the Statehouse. If you would like to speak to your representative or give them a note, see one of the doorkeepers at either side of the House chamber. While facing the chamber, the Republican doorkeeper is on your left and the Democratic doorkeeper is on your right.

The House can convene at various times throughout the day. A live video stream can be found on the General Assembly website (iga.in.gov).

The House is comprised of 100 members. As of the writing of this toolkit, there were 70 Republicans and 30 Democrats.



Speaker of the House:

Todd Huston,
Republican



Minority Leader:

Phil GiaQuinta, Democrat

House Standing Committees

The House has more than 20 different standing committees that hear bills relative to each committee's subject areas. Most of the bills ISTA will be tracking will be heard in the Education, Employment, Labor and Pensions and Ways and Means Committees.



Senate

The Senate is located on the third floor of the Statehouse. A viewing gallery is available above the chamber on the fourth floor.

Senate members have offices throughout the Statehouse. If you would like to speak to your senator or give them a note, see one of the doorkeepers at either side of the Senate chamber. While facing the chamber, the Republican doorkeeper is on your right and the Democratic doorkeeper is on your left.

The Senate can convene at various times throughout the day. A live video stream can be found on the General Assembly website (iga.in.gov).

The Senate is comprised of 50 members. As of the writing of this toolkit, there were 40 Republicans and 10 Democrats.



President/Lieutenant Governor:
Suzanne Crouch, Republican



President Pro Tempore of the Senate:
Rodric Bray, Republican



Minority Leader:
Greg Taylor,
Democratic

Senate Standing Committees

The Senate has more than 20 different standing committees that hear bills relative to each committee's subject areas. Most of the bills ISTA will be tracking will be heard in the Education and Career Development, Pensions and Labor and Appropriations Committees.



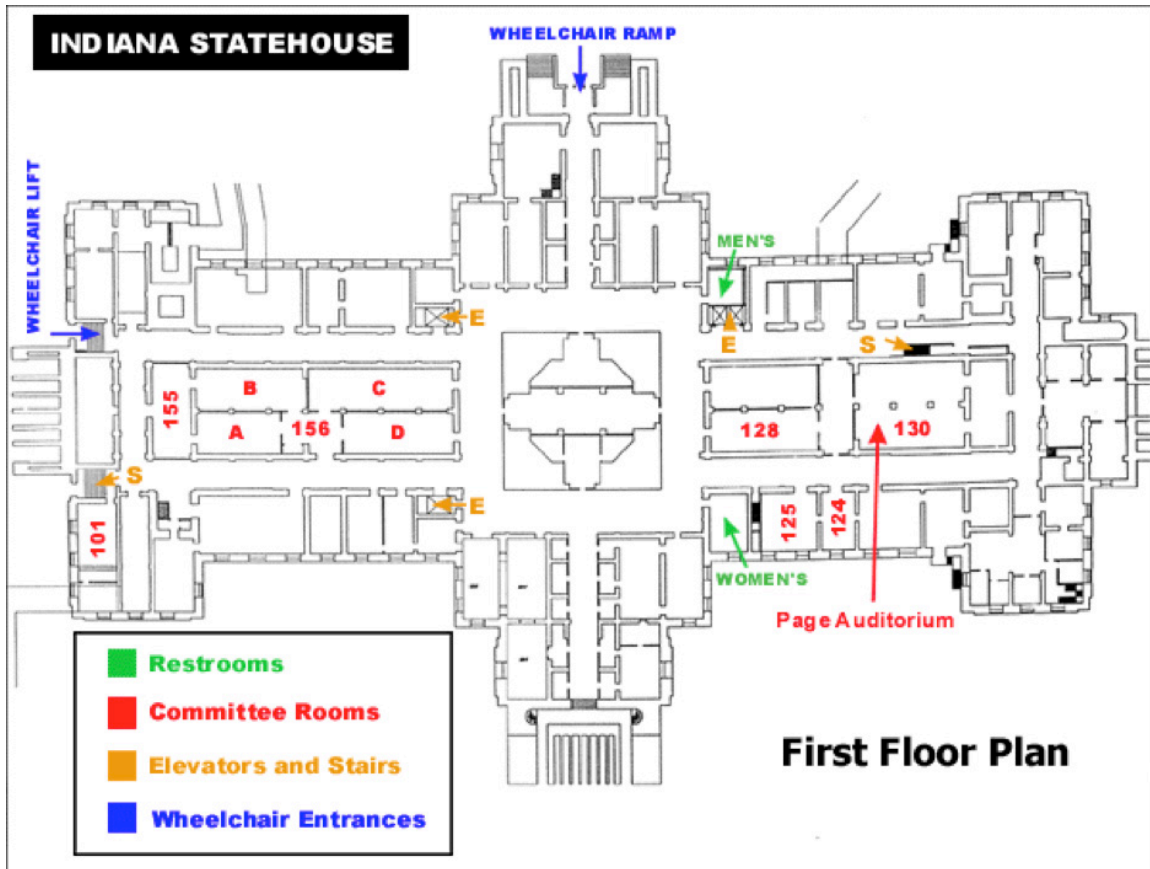
How to Navigate the Indiana Statehouse

The Indiana Statehouse is located at **200 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.**

Enter the Statehouse through the east entrance from Capitol and Market Streets. All visitors must pass through security and metal detectors before entering. Firearms, knives and other weapons are prohibited.

Note: The basement of the Statehouse is considered the first floor. Remember this as you determine what floor you need.

Floor Maps



First Floor:

A. Committee Rooms

1. 101
2. 124
3. 125
4. 128
5. 155
6. 156A
7. 156B
8. 156C
9. 156D

B. Restrooms

1. Men's
2. Women's

C. Wheelchair Accessible Entrances

1. Ramp
2. Lift

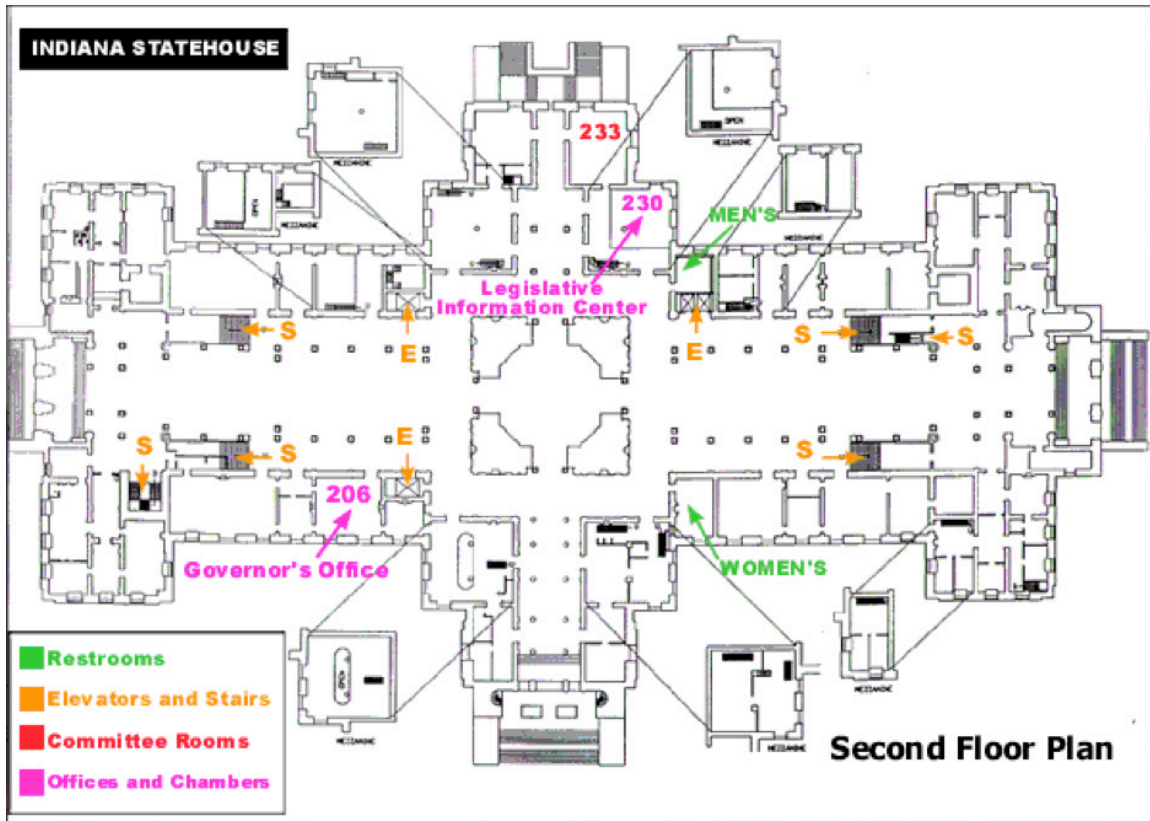
D. Elevators and Stairs

1. Elevators
2. Stairs

E. Page Auditorium

1. 130

Floor Maps



Second Floor:

A. Committee Rooms

1. 233

B. Restrooms

1. Men's
2. Women's

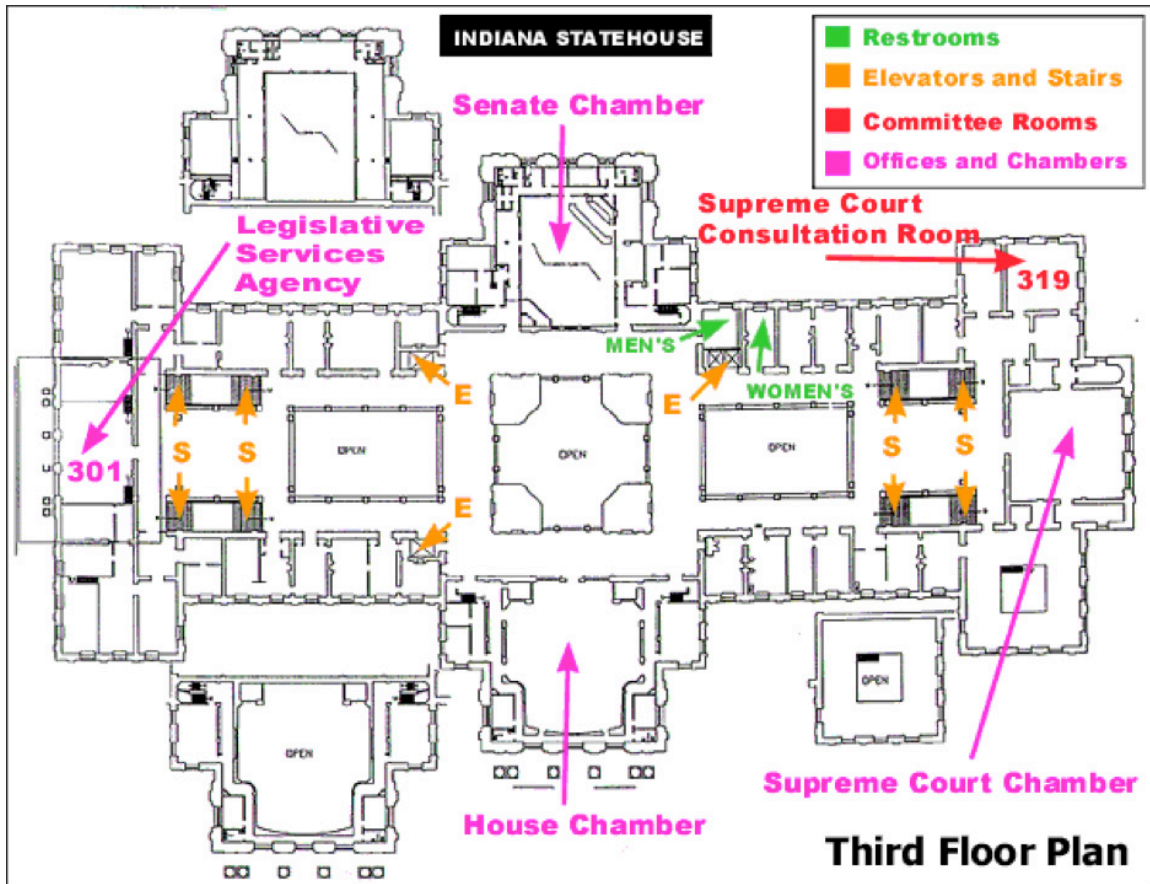
C. Offices and Chambers

1. Governor's Office
2. Legislative Information Center

D. Elevators and Stairs

1. Elevators
2. Stairs

Floor Maps



Third Floor:

A. Committee Rooms

1. Supreme Court Consultation Room-319

B. Restrooms

1. Men's
2. Women's

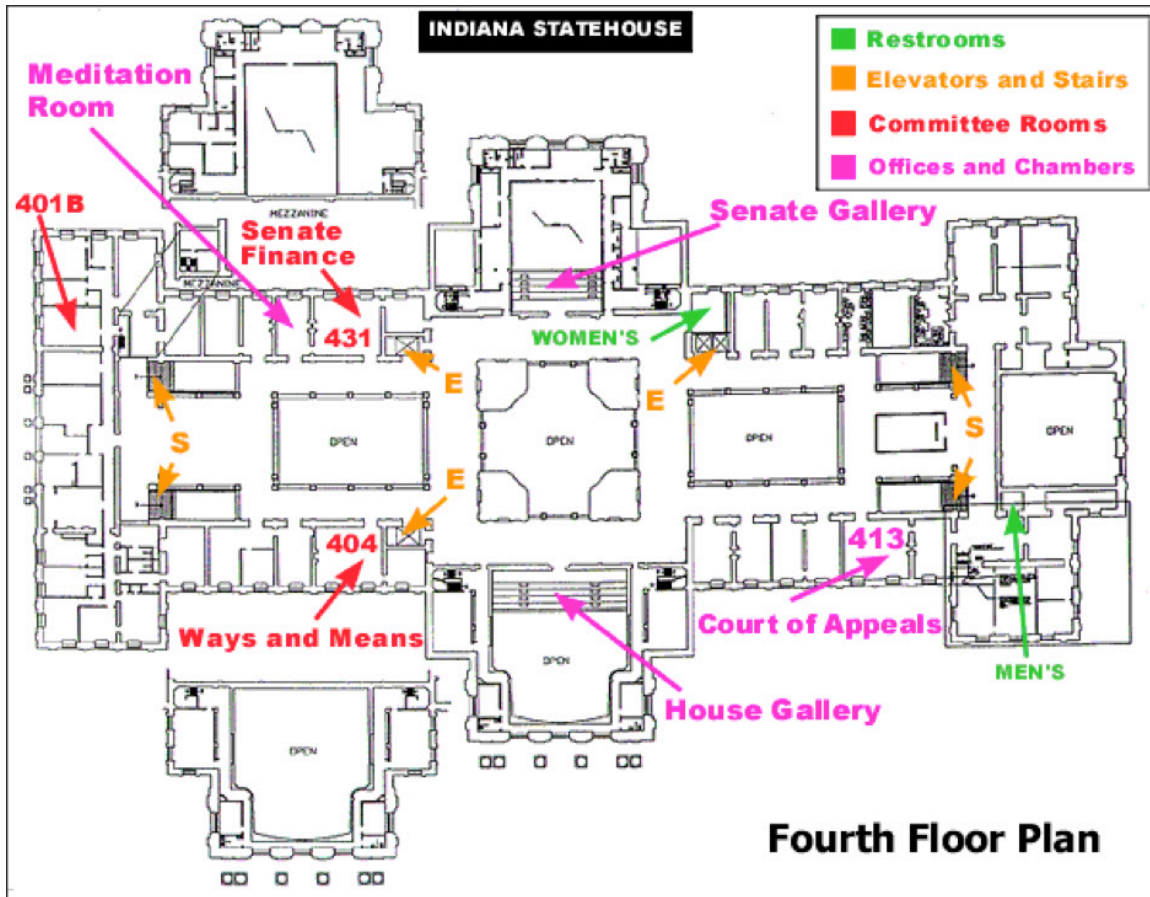
C. Offices and Chambers

1. Senate Chamber
2. House Chamber
3. Supreme Court Chamber
4. Legislative Services Agency

D. Elevators and Stairs

1. Elevators
2. Stairs

Floor Maps



Fourth Floor:

A. Committee Rooms

1. 401B
2. Ways and Means-404
3. Senate Finance-431

B. Restrooms

1. Men's
2. Women's

C. Offices and Chambers

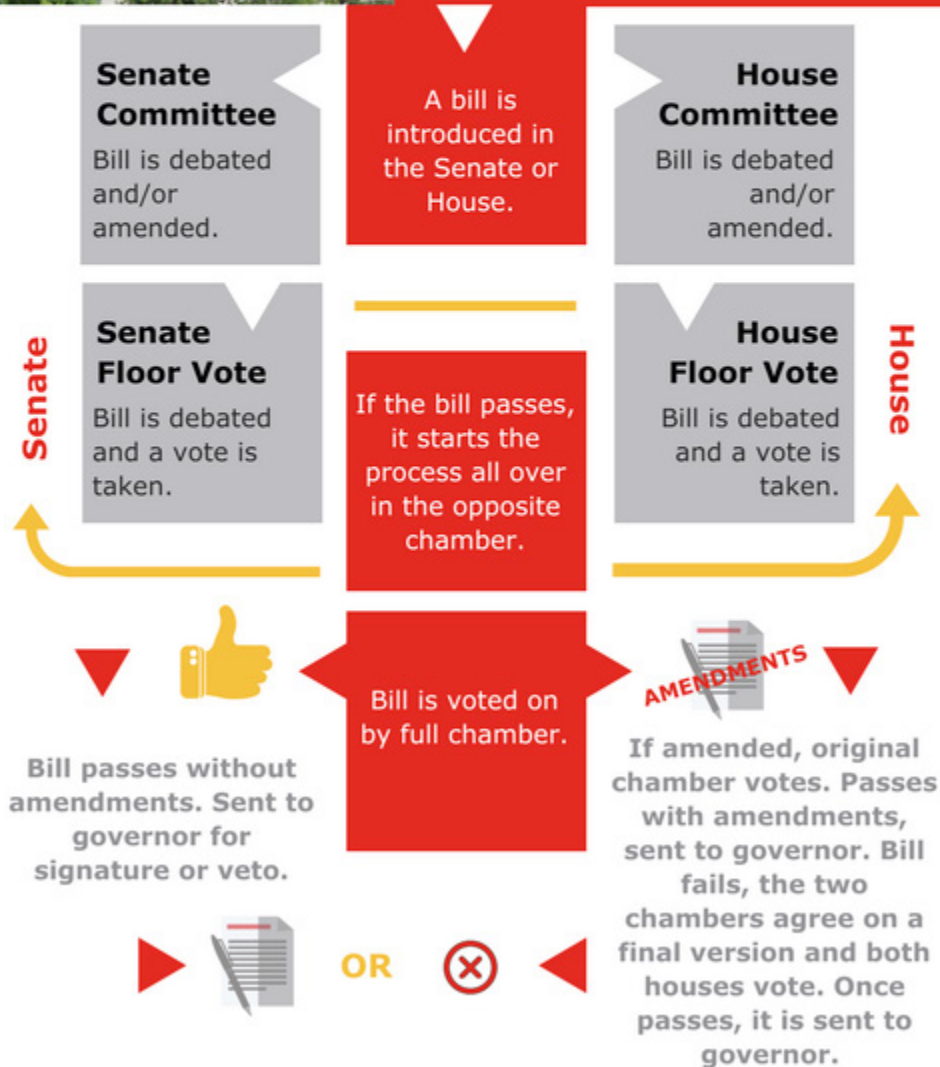
1. Senate Gallery
2. House Gallery
3. Court of Appeals
4. Meditation Room

D. Elevators and Stairs

1. Elevators
2. Stairs



How a Bill Becomes a Law





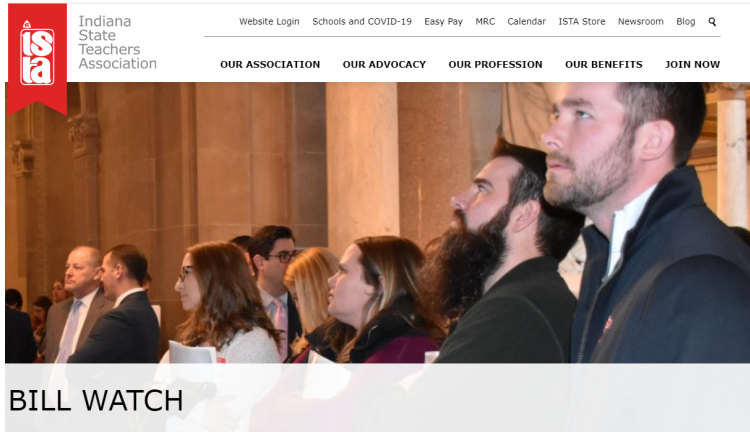
Additional Tools



Find and Track Legislation

During the legislative session, the ISTA government relations team tracks bills that impact kids and educators, from education policy to changes in public retirement benefits and collective bargaining.

Find the Bill Watch under Our Advocacy on ista-in.org. Additional information can be found on the General Assembly website at iga.in.gov.



During the legislative session our public affairs team tracks bills significant to our members.

By clicking one of the bill watch reports below you will be able to read a bill digest, the three most recent bill statuses, and if the bill is in a committee, the committee's meeting time and location.

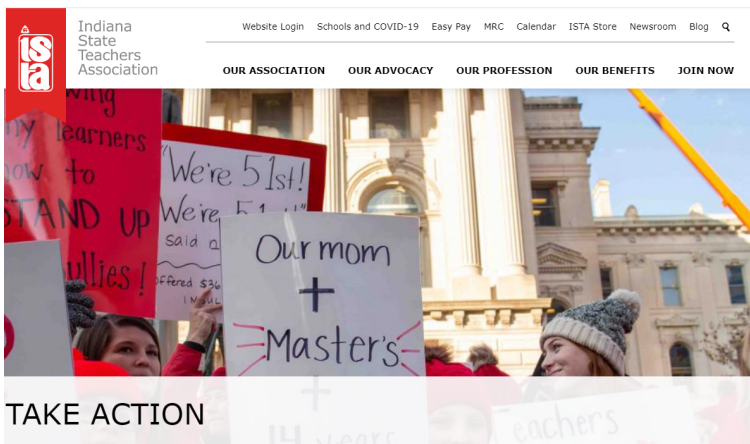
This information will empower you as an advocate, lead efforts in your community to write and meet with your legislators and make your voice heard.



Use the ISTA Advocacy Action Center

ista-in.org/TakeAction

Our advocacy program will help you stay informed, as well as make it easy for you to engage with your elected officials. Visit the advocacy page and the ISTA blog frequently to check on our latest action items and local and national news. This tool is designed to be the easiest way for you to be informed and connect on the issues of most importance to public education.



Educators, parents, communities and students stand together to ensure all students have access to a quality, public education. Complete the action forms below to tell policymakers why public education should be fully and equitably funded, teacher pay increased and bargaining rights restored to improve learning conditions.

TAKE ACTION: Tell legislators to prioritize public schools in state budget



Stay Informed

Check your inbox for our weekly newsletter to stay updated on legislative news, events, inspiration and more.



Send a Letter to the Editor

Tell your community why you support community public schools by writing a letter to the editor of your local paper. Each newspaper has a specific contact and process for submitting a letter, so be sure to check their website. Below are a few tips to best make your voice heard.

1. **Personalize it.** Share your experience and form an emotional connection.
2. **Provide a solution or action.** Tell the audience what they can do or what we encourage legislators to do.
3. **Be concise.** Keep your letter to approximately 300 words.
4. **Download the template.** Get started with our **free template** today.



Get Social

Follow ISTA on social media for more content to share.



indianastateteachers



@ISTAmembers



@istamembers



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Indiana State Teachers Association

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