



ADVOCATE TOOLKIT

HOW TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Our kids. Our schools. Our future.



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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?

- **Equitable funding and strengthening early education.**
- **Fair compensation and benefits for educators.**
- **Professional development and regulatory reforms.**
- **Student support and school safety.**
- **Advance educator safety and equity.**

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 attend schools facing critical staffing challenges due to years of underfunded salaries, a lack of professional respect and growing demands on educators with limited resources. Addressing these systemic challenges is essential to ensure students have access to qualified teachers and supportive learning environments.
- Low starting salaries and stagnant wages throughout educators' careers are discouraging talented individuals from pursuing teaching, even as Indiana faces record shortages of teachers in critical areas like special education, STEM and early childhood education.
- Attacks on educators' expertise and growing micromanagement of their classrooms are demoralizing, making it harder for them to do what they know is best for students in an increasingly complex and diverse society.
- Educators need supportive school environments where they have planning time, mental health resources, manageable class sizes and fully funded schools to help every child thrive.
- Every child deserves access to a neighborhood school with qualified teachers, manageable class sizes, and sufficient nurses, counselors, and staff to support their academic and emotional well-being.
- Short-term fixes like one-time bonuses and lowering licensure standards can't address the underlying problems causing teacher shortages. These challenges demand systemic solutions that ensure students receive the quality education they need to succeed.
- Solving Indiana's educator shortage requires a two-pronged approach: recruiting diverse, talented individuals into teaching and retaining the experienced educators who are leaving the classroom due to burnout, low pay and lack of professional respect.
- Key policy solutions to address the shortage include: increasing pay and benefits, improving working conditions and restoring respect and professional autonomy for educators.
- Lawmakers must commit to providing the funding and resources needed to support public schools and address disparities between high- and low-income communities, ensuring every student has a fair chance to succeed.



How to Contact Your Legislator



Call Your Legislator

Contact the Indiana 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.

Setting Meetings with Legislators

- When calling to set-up an appointment with a legislator, ask to talk to their assistant.
- If the legislator is unable to meet with you, request a meeting with their assistant. This is an important relationship to establish because their assistant works with the legislator daily and can provide access.
- Legislative assistants often have more time and will have insight on legislation which they follow for the legislator they're assisting.



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 attending a meeting, be polite as you talk to legislators about important issues and bills. If the bill or issue has not been assigned to the legislators' committee, they may need to be educated.
- Be sure to ask a legislator's voting intentions. Often, asking questions to consider on a bill is a way to get them thinking on how an issue may impact their local community.
- 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 X, Threads 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

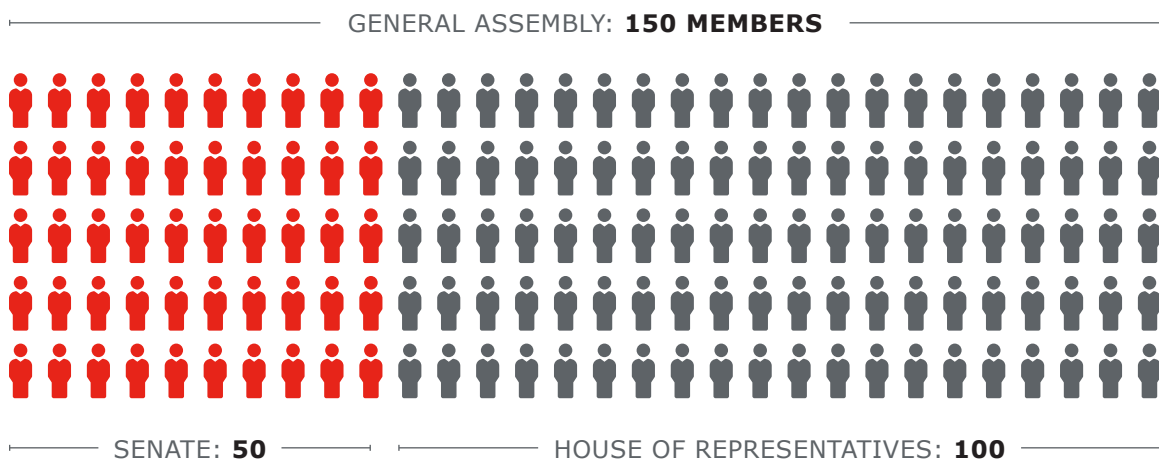
The best way to get a legislator's attention is to develop a friendship. It's especially helpful if you contact your legislator from time to time with a good word or some update on your classroom or personal ventures, rather than just contacting your legislator when you have troubles.



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:
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:
Micah Beckwith, Republican



President Pro Tempore of the Senate:
Rodric Bray, Republican



Minority Leader:
Shelli Yoder, 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

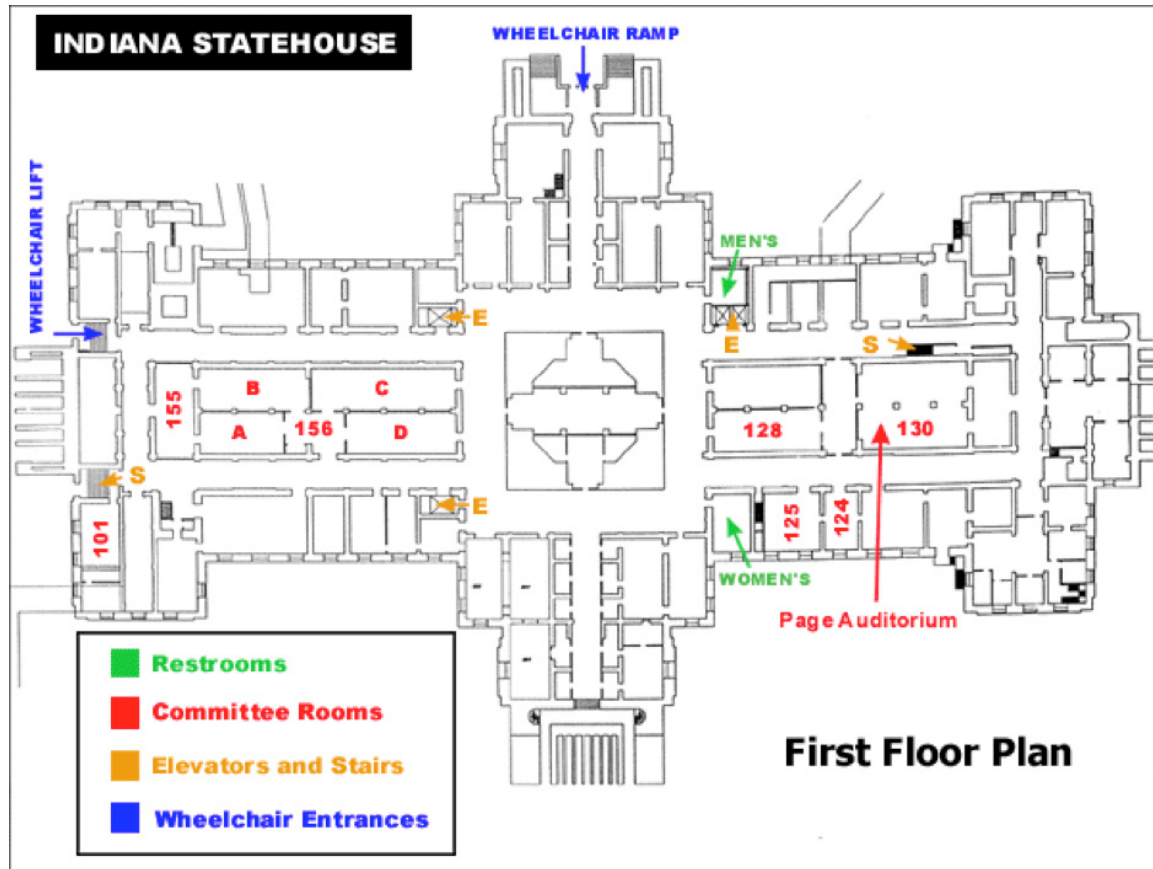
The Indiana Statehouse is located at **200 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.**

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.

Individuals needing an accessible entrance should enter the first floor entrance on the west side of the Statehouse. There are limited accessible parking spaces closest to this entrance. Should you have questions or need assistance contact us at 800-ASK ISTA. You will be forwarded to the appropriate ISTA staff person to answer your questions.

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

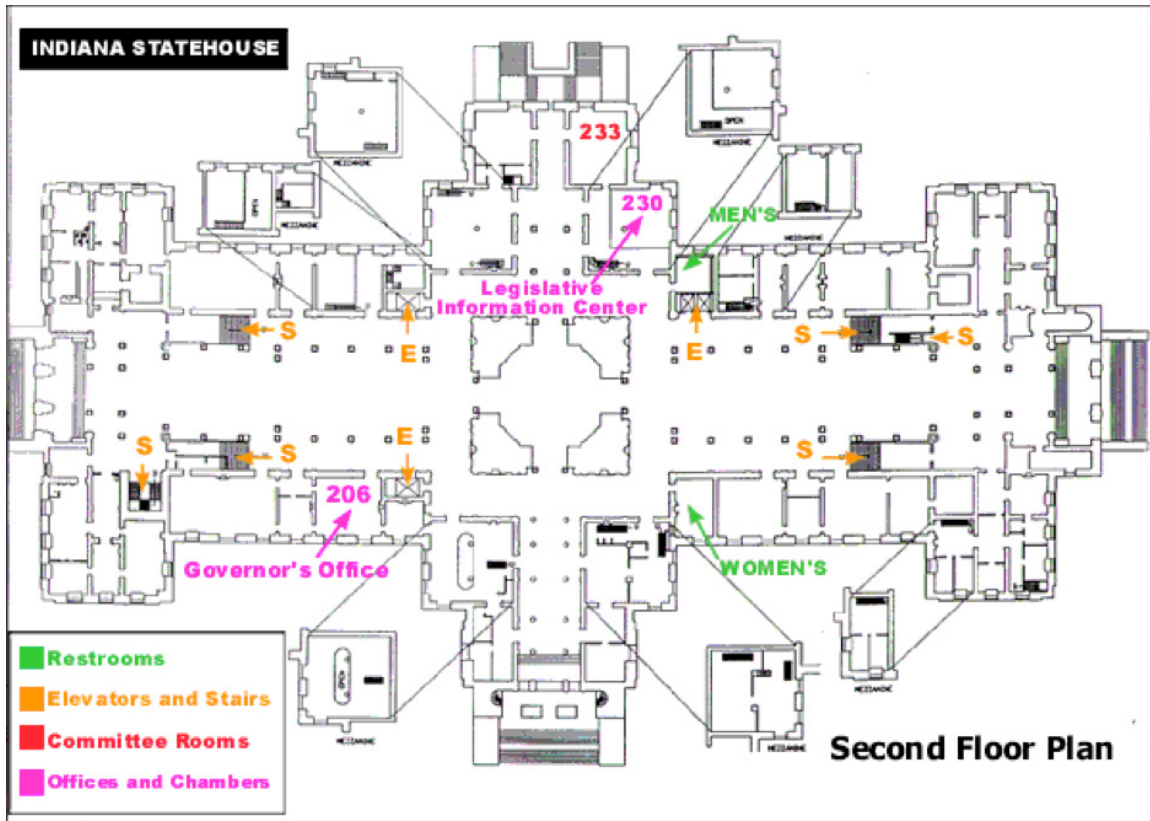
D. Elevators and Stairs

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

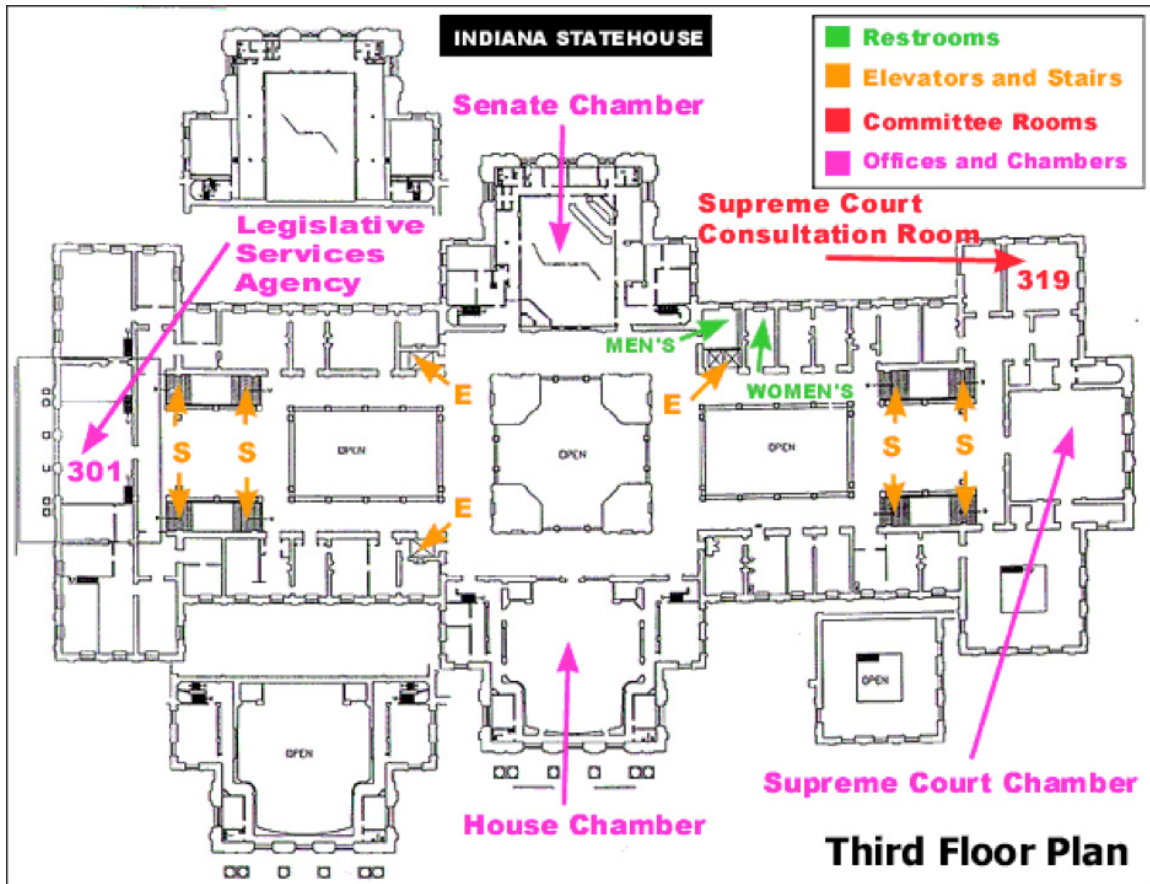
C. Offices and Chambers

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

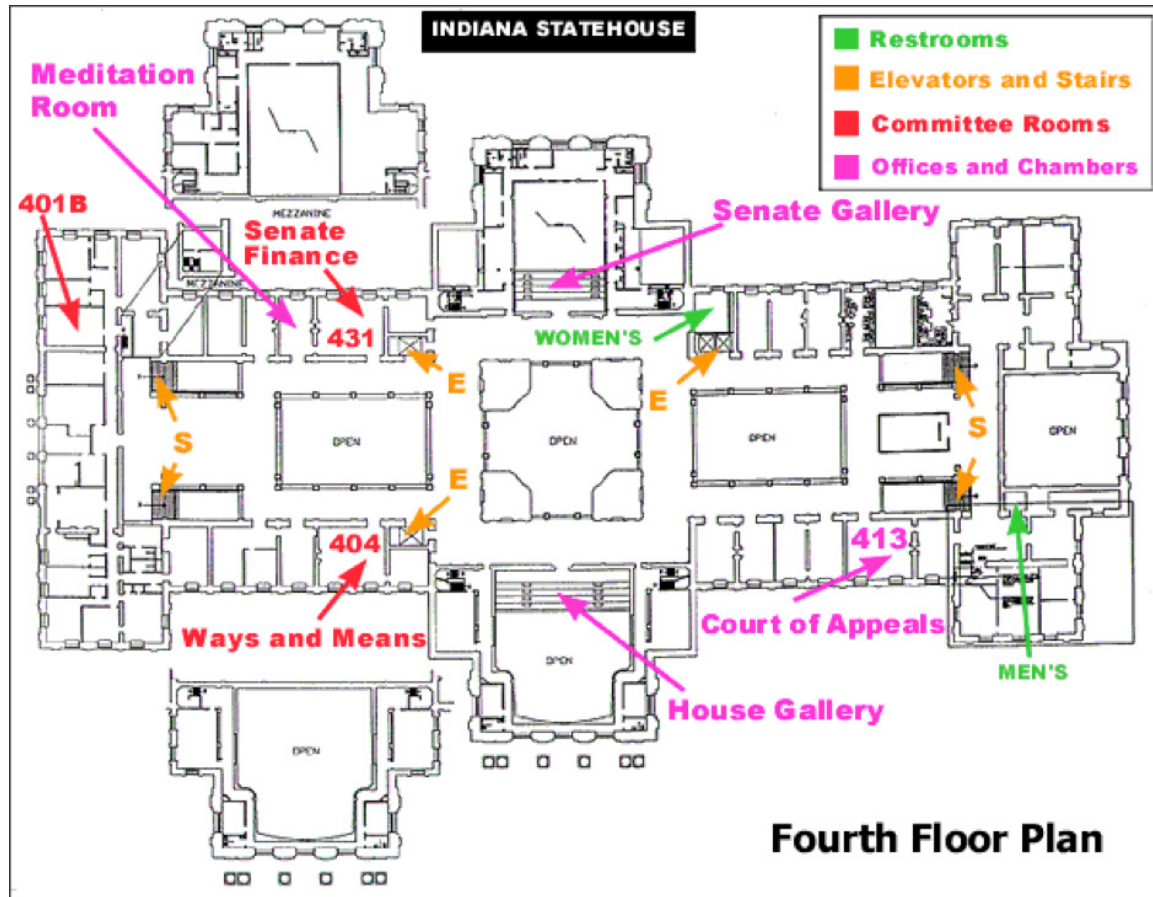
C. Offices and Chambers

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

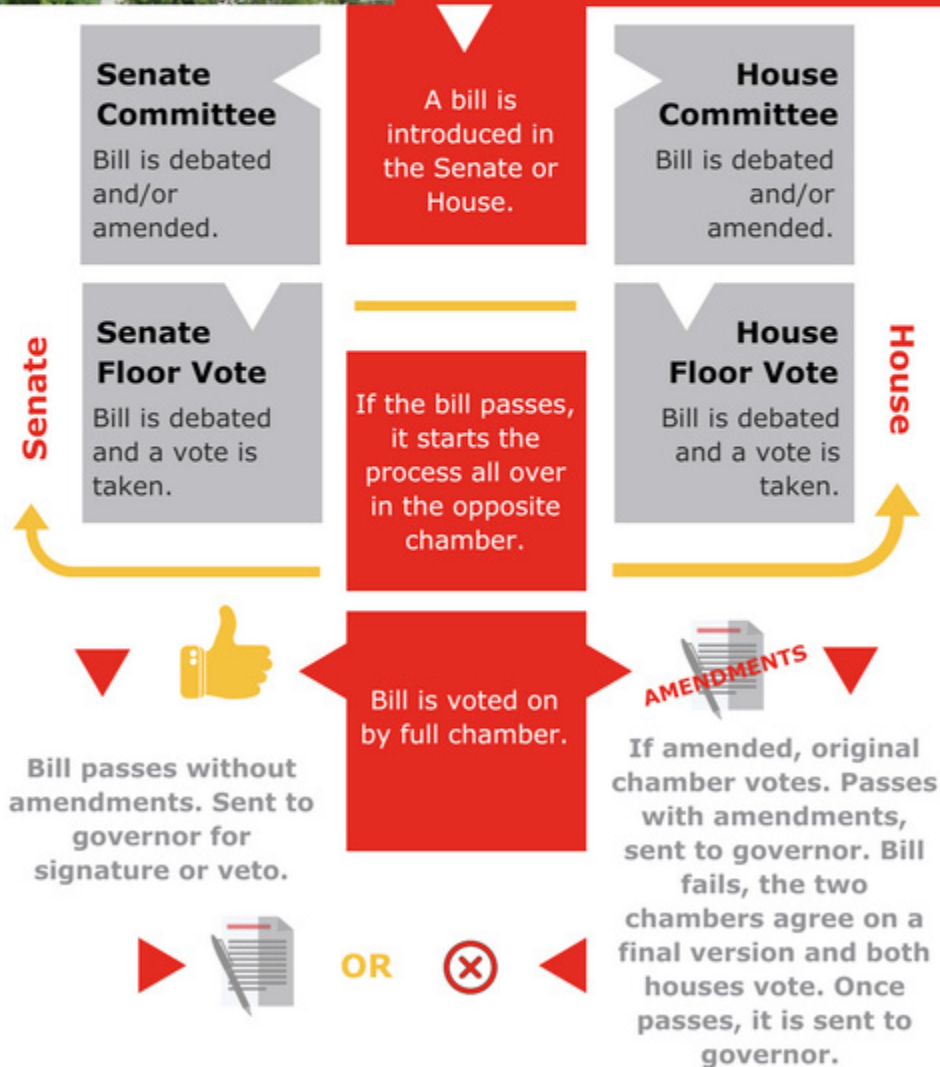
1. Senate Gallery
2. House Gallery
3. Court of Appeals
4. Meditation Room

D. Elevators and Stairs

1. Elevators
2. Stairs



How a Bill Becomes a Law





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.



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