

SCHOOL + STATE FINANCE PROJECT



CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY LEGISLATIVE GUIDE

An introduction to Connecticut's state government with tips for interacting with legislators and making your voice heard

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www.schoolstatefinance.org

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Introduction

The School and State Finance Project has created this Legislative Guide to help community members better engage with Connecticut elected officials and make sure their voices are heard on issues that are important to them.

This guide was created to help you feel as empowered as possible, regardless of how you choose to engage with your elected officials.

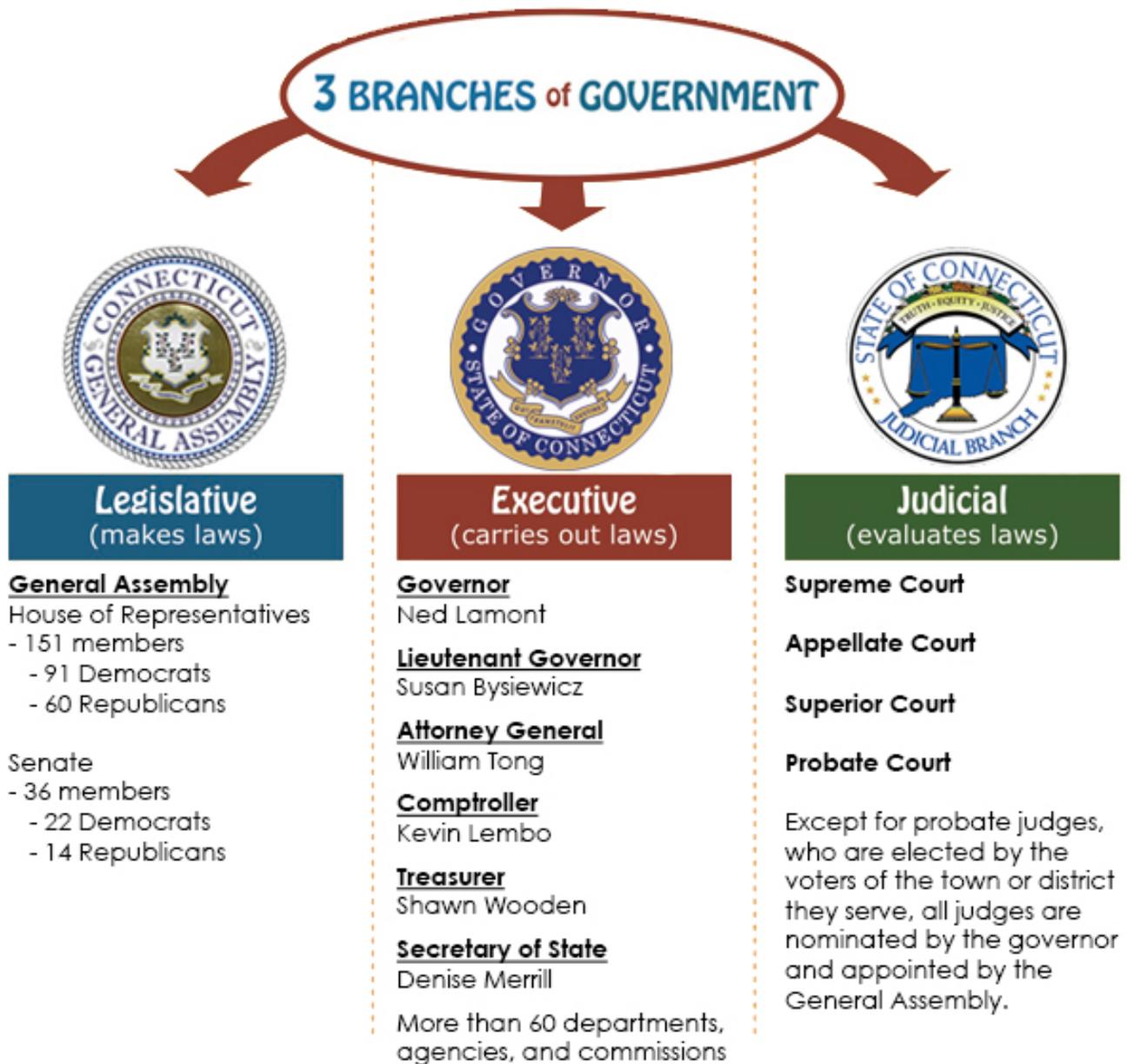
There are many ways to make your voice heard to elected officials, whether it's testifying at a public hearing, scheduling a meeting with a state representative or senator, attending a local legislative body's meeting, or even something as simple as calling your mayor about an issue that really matters to you.

We hope this guide helps you. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at info@schoolstatefinance.org and we'll get back to you as soon as we can.

Levels of Government in Connecticut



Connecticut State Government



The Connecticut General Assembly

The Connecticut General Assembly, Connecticut's legislative branch, consists of a House of Representatives and a Senate. State representatives and senators represent the interests of the cities, towns, and people of their district.

Members of the House and Senate are elected in November of even-numbered years for two-year terms. In November 2018, a new class of legislators was elected and features new members as well as returning members who were reelected to office. Legislators may not hold any other elected or appointed office in state government while serving as a legislator. In Connecticut, being a state legislator is a part-time job so most legislators have a second job outside of the General Assembly.

House of Representatives

The House of Representatives has 151 members, each representing a legislative district consisting of roughly the same population (about 22,500 people).

The House is presided over by a Speaker of the House, who is elected by the members of the House of Representatives and is typically from the political party in the House with the most elected representatives, known as the majority party. The speaker appoints House chairpersons of joint committees and assigns House members to committees. Additionally, the speaker may refer bills to the appropriate committees. After the 2018 elections, the Democrats are the majority party of the House.

Senate

Connecticut's Senate contains 36 members from individual districts consisting of roughly the same population (about 100,000 people).

The Senate is presided over by the lieutenant governor who is the president of the Senate. While the lieutenant governor doesn't normally have a vote in the Senate, they may cast the deciding vote if there is a tie.

Members of the Senate also elect a president pro tempore, commonly referred to as the "president pro tem," who appoints the Senate chairpersons of joint committees and assigns senators to committees. The president pro tempore is typically a member of the majority political party in the Senate. After the 2018 elections, the Democrats are the majority party of the Senate.

Interacting with the General Assembly

Finding Your State Legislators

Each resident in Connecticut has both an elected state representative and state senator. To find out who your state legislators are, you can:

- Visit <https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/menu/cgafindleg.asp>
- Call one of the four caucuses:
 - [Senate Democrats](#): 860-240-8600
 - [Senate Republicans](#): 860-240-8800
 - [House Democrats](#): 860-240-8500
 - [House Republicans](#): 860-240-8700
- Reach out to the School and State Finance Project

To view a list of all House members or Senate members, go to <https://www.cga.ct.gov/>, click the "Representation" tab, then simply click "[House Members List](#)" or "[Senate Members List](#)." From there, you will have access to the website for every representative or senator.

Contacting Your State Legislators

Once you know who your state legislators are, you can call, email, write a letter, or schedule a meeting with them to discuss issues related to state government that are important to you or to ask for assistance in navigating state government agencies. To find your state legislator's contact information, you can visit the [Connecticut General Assembly website](#), or call the caucus your legislator belongs to.

Your first point of contact will probably be a legislative aide (LA). LAs work directly for state legislators and are responsible for recording, organizing, and relaying information to state legislators.

Calling Your Legislators

When you call your legislator, an LA will answer the phone and ask you for your **name, address, and telephone number** to make sure you live within the legislator's district. If an LA is unavailable, your call will go to voicemail. It's helpful to have your message prepared beforehand so you don't leave out any important information. If you're leaving a voicemail, make sure to mention you'd like a call back so an LA knows you'd like to continue your conversation.

Example Script:

Hello! My name is [name] and I live at [address]. I'm calling today because I wanted to talk to you about an issue that's very important to me. My child is in the 4th grade and goes to [school]. I've noticed some of the textbooks they are using are very outdated and are missing important events that have happened within the last five years. It's important to me that my child learns relevant information and I think a simple way to ensure this is to invest in updated textbooks for all our students.

If this is not a voicemail message, the LA you're talking to will likely ask for your contact information so your legislator can get in touch with you.

If this is a voicemail message, it's helpful to say something along the lines of the following so your legislator or their LA knows how to contact you:

I'd love to discuss this further so we can work together to figure out a way to resolve this issue. My phone number is [phone number] and my email address is [email address]. Thank you for your time, have a great day!

Emailing Your Legislators

When emailing your legislators, be as clear and concise as possible about what you're writing to them about and what you'd like their help with. Make sure you start by including that you're a resident of their district, then explain what you're concerned about, and why and how they can help. For example, if you're concerned about school funding, you can include a short story about your experience with school funding to explain why it's a cause you care about, and ask your legislator to get in touch with you to further discuss how this issue is impacting you and your community.

Make sure you include your address and phone number so your legislator knows how to get in touch with you.

Emails can sometimes get lost in the shuffle, especially during legislative session. Give your legislators and their LAs about a week to respond and feel free to follow up if you don't hear from them for a while.

Writing Your Legislators

When writing a letter to your legislators, you have an opportunity to explain your thoughts in detail. This does not mean you should write an exhaustive essay, but you can go into more detail than you should in an email. Because reading and replying to a letter takes a little more time and energy, do not expect a letter back for a few weeks, if at all. If you include your email or phone number in your letter, that will most likely be the method a legislator or aide uses to get back to you.

Below is a guide for how to address a letter to your legislator.

State Senator

Envelope: The Honorable [Insert Name]
 State Senate
 Legislative Office Building
 Hartford, Connecticut 06106-1591

Salutation: Dear Senator [Insert Name]:

State Representative

Envelope: The Honorable [Insert Name]
State House of Representatives
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, Connecticut 06106-1591

Salutation: Dear Representative [Insert Name]:

For reference, on the next page we've included a letter written by a high school student to their state legislator (we've removed the student's name and address for privacy).

Student A
Home Address
Bridgeport CT, 06605
Email Address

The Honorable Antonio Felipe
CT State House of Representatives
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Representative Felipe,

I am a sophomore at Bassick High School in the Bridgeport Public School system. Some of the daily challenges students have to face are the crowded classrooms. Classes are usually filled with about 29 kids. With classes full like these, kids will be distracted. Another problem caused by the lack of funding is budget cuts. We have lost some of our electives, one being our music elective, which many kids including myself enjoyed very much. Another result of the lack of funding is the fact that in the past 7 years we've had 8 principals. If the school is underfunded it will create a more difficult environment to work in for the principal. This has caused many problems, such as inconsistencies throughout the school years.

Having been in the Bridgeport school district all my life, I can't know firsthand how drastic the difference between districts is. However, according to the School and State Finance Project, I receive only \$14,241 while if I simply lived in Hartford I would receive nearly \$5,000 more at around \$19,600. This is only one of the cities that are funded more than Bridgeport. I sincerely hope that you will vote for a new and better system of funding schools if the chance arrives.

In conclusion, I feel you as a representative are able to make a change in this broken system. It may be hard to see how the school system will affect you, but ask yourself, "Would you want your child to attend a school like Bassick?" A way you can help change the way schools are funded is by helping to pass any new bills that you come across.

Sincerely,

Student A

Scheduling a Meeting

If you want to meet with your legislator, you should include that in your phone call, email, or letter. It's a good idea to let them know what you want to meet about and who will be at the meeting. The LA will be in touch with you to figure out a time/date/location.

Many legislators meet at their Capitol office in Hartford or at local meeting places in the district where they live. Legislators try to prioritize meeting with constituents but sometimes, they may have a busy schedule and may not be able to meet with you right away. Be patient and follow up with the LA who's been working with you if you have concerns.

Meetings with legislators are typically anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour, depending on the legislator and their availability. Legislators usually schedule a "meeting block" where they have anywhere from 2-8 meetings back to back in order to make sure everyone who requests a meeting gets one, so please be respectful of their time.

With that in mind, it's a good idea to prepare a "one-pager" of what you would like to meet with your legislator about. This should include, but doesn't have to be limited to:

- Your name and contact information
- Information regarding the topic you are concerned about
- Resources your legislator can use to learn more

It's important to remember your legislator may approach the issues you care about differently, and each of you may know information that others don't. Although this can be frustrating at times, understand that ultimately, you're both working toward a common goal: improving your community.

Building & Maintaining a Relationship

After your first meeting with your legislator, it's a good idea to send a quick thank you email, reminding them of who you are and why a particular issue matters to you. Don't be discouraged if they don't always remember everything you've talked about. Build a relationship by reaching out to your legislators at least once a year with updates on the issues you care about and ideas for improving your community and the state.

Other Ways to Make Your Voice Heard

You can also make your voice heard to your legislators by writing letters to the editor or op-eds in your local newspapers and media outlets. Letters to the editor and op-eds provide an outlet to discuss an issue that's important to you and explain your position, and give you more of an opportunity to share your concerns in slightly more detail. To submit a letter to the editor or an op-ed, call the publication to find out who to send it to or check the publication's website. Most publications have submission information under the contact page on their website.

When writing a letter to the editor or an op-ed, remember these helpful tips:

- Focus on one aspect of a specific issue and make your points clear and concise
- Use your personal experiences and facts to convey your point

- Make sure your op-ed ties into a current event or something in the news cycle
- Be sure your submission adheres to the publication's guidelines; letters to the editor are typically no longer than 250-300 words and op-eds are generally no more than 750 words
- Identify a possible solution or action step that should be taken to address the issue you're writing about
- Do not use images or graphics, including charts or graphs, in your letter to the editor or op-ed
- Write for the audience you want to speak to
- Reinforce your point of view throughout the piece

Testifying at a Public Hearing

Often times, legislators don't hear enough from their constituents about how a legislative bill will impact them until after the bill is passed. If you're interested in reaching many legislators at once, before they vote on a bill, you may be interested in testifying at a public hearing. For information on testifying at a public hearing, in addition to what we've provided below, please visit <https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/Content/YourVoice.asp>.

Getting Ready

To testify, it is important to know the name and number of the bill you're interested in speaking about. To find out, call the bill status information room at (860) 240-0555, or call one of your legislator's offices for help.

Once you know the bill number, you can check in with the committee of origin (the legislative committee where the bill will have its public hearing) to find out when and where the public hearing will take place, as well as information on how to sign up to testify. The [Connecticut General Assembly's website](#) allows you to retrieve bill status information including the bill's current text, up-to-date actions on the bill, the name of the legislator who introduced the bill, the bill's statement of purpose, and the bill's co-sponsors.

Written Testimony

If you cannot attend a public hearing but would still like to submit testimony, please contact the respective committee clerk to find out the best address to mail or email your comments.

Testimony can be as simple as the example letters in the previous section. If you want to leave written testimony for legislators to have, and for it to be available online for the public, it's helpful to make enough copies for all members of the committee holding the hearing, with about 10 extra copies for staff. (Please be aware that committee staff cannot make copies for you.) Make sure you turn in your written testimony *before* the hearing begins so committee staff can distribute copies and make sure it's posted online.

Testifying in Person

The time limit for public testimony is three minutes so it's important to keep your viewpoints and reasoning as clear as possible. It's helpful to write out your testimony and then practice saying it out loud to a family member or friend so you can time it and make sure the information you want to convey is actually being conveyed.

Similar to submitting written testimony, if you'd like your testimony to be made available online to the public, as well as distributed to members of the committee holding the hearing, make sure you turn in your written testimony before the hearing begins and that you make the appropriate amount of copies beforehand.

Finding the Hearing Room

Most hearings, if not all, are held in the Legislative Office Building (LOB), but it's always smart to check the [Connecticut General Assembly website](#) or contact an LA to confirm where the hearing will be held. Additionally, near the LOB cafeteria, and on the third floor near the skywalk to the LOB garage, there are digital directories where all of the day's happenings are displayed. You can also find a bulletin of all the hearing room information, and which bills are scheduled for a public hearing, on the [Connecticut General Assembly website](#) if you're unable to physically go to Hartford and check in person.

Signing Up to Testify

To sign up to testify during a public hearing, you will have to get instructions from the committee hosting the public hearing. Generally, you must always sign up in person the morning of the hearing, then wait for your name to be called once the hearing starts. Additionally, there are two different ways committees typically decide the order to testify: 1) you pick a lottery number and the list goes from the lowest number to the greatest or 2) first come, first serve. For more information on the committee's sign up process, contact the committee clerk, whose contact information you can find by calling one of the four caucuses mentioned above, or on the [Connecticut General Assembly website](#).

At the Public Hearing

After you sign up, you'll have to wait for your name to be called. Usually, legislators, public officials, and the executive or judiciary branch agency heads are given the first hour of the hearing to discuss the bill before public testimonies begin. This means you may be waiting anywhere from 1-2 hours to 5-8 hours before you testify. In order to get a sense of how long a hearing will be, you can ask the committee clerk the day before, or check the public sign-up list to see how many people plan to testify.

You are welcome to wait in the cafeteria on the first floor of the LOB where you can get coffee, a snack, and breakfast/lunch, depending on the time of day.

You may see legislators going in and out of hearing rooms, working on their laptops, speaking with their colleagues or eating lunch. This is because sometimes hearings can take all day and, while legislators are required to be there all day, they may have to multitask so they don't fall behind on work or forget to eat. Sometimes, legislators are scheduled to be present at multiple hearings at the same time, so they also may be switching back and forth between hearings. This isn't a sign of disrespect, and you shouldn't feel like they are not listening to you if you find them doing this during your own testimony.

There will also be other people in the hearing room waiting to testify and listen to the hearing. You should be as quiet as possible in a hearing room so legislators can hear who is testifying, and to show respect to the person testifying. If you have to take a phone call or use the restroom, feel free to leave, but try to do so quietly. Lastly, although hearing someone testify may make you want to clap, while some committees do allow it, applause is generally not allowed since it can slow down the process.

Once it is your turn, you will have three minutes to testify. Although it may feel intimidating, remember legislators are people too, and the most important part is you're sharing your own story. After three minutes, a bell will ring signifying you need to conclude your remarks. At this point, legislators may ask you questions or allow you to finish your final thought. No one is expecting you to be an expert on any issue, so just be honest and do your best.

Telling Your Story

Why is storytelling important?

- More areas of the brain are activated through story rather than through facts alone
- Experiencing emotions enhances memory
- Connection points are created between a listener's experiences and the person who is telling the story

Think about how you relate what happened to you on a given day to a friend or family member: you share a series of stories, and the person hearing your story relates, aligning similar personal experiences and resulting feelings.

Storytelling should be centered around the critical question, "What do you want people to know and understand?"

A few things to remember when you tell your story:

- **Who is your audience?** Are these people you know? Residents of your community? Is this a specific group such as business owners, legislators, parents? Are these decision-makers or influencers?
- **What is your truth on the topic of school finance?** How have you experienced or witnessed the results of inequitable school funding? What have you witnessed that made you concerned about how we fund schools in Connecticut?
- **How does the story evolve?** Your story should have a beginning, middle, and end, and a main character (this may be you or your child, for example). Who is the story about and how can they relate to or touch your audience?
- **What is the specific problem you are speaking about?** Make clear connections between school funding inequity (facts) and experiences (story). Data should be used to make an impact but sparsely. Your story is the most important piece of this.
- **How will a proposed solution change the problem you are pointing out?** How will the outcome of your story be different if a proposed change or solution is enacted? This is similar to a "pick your own ending" type of story, placing the listener in the position to decide the best outcome for the star of your story.

Another way to think about storytelling, in three parts:

1. **Story of Self:** What brought you to the level of care and concern you have for this issue? Why do you care about this? This gives the audience an opportunity to understand.

2. **Story of Us:** How does your story fit into the bigger story of schools and communities in Connecticut?
3. **Story of Now:** What choice or action are you asking people to make, and why now?

Example Public Hearing Testimony

Testimony Regarding H.B. 7150, An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning Education

Student B
Education Committee
Friday, March 1, 2019

Chairmen McCrory and Sanchez, Ranking Members Bethel and McCarty, and distinguished members of the Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on H.B. 7150 and discuss Governor Ned Lamont's education budget recommendations.

I am currently a sophomore attending Bassick High School in Bridgeport, Connecticut. As a student in Bridgeport, I've come across some daily struggles like cluttered classes, outdated textbooks, and lack of staff since I was in elementary school. We're told we need to work at our full potential, but my question is, "How do you expect us to work at our full potential when we have to hurdle over more obstacles than the average person?" We've had electives cut, staff resign, classes cluttered, and a lack of security. This highlights the dysfunction of the school and how it fails to provide the necessary materials to students due to a lack of order and organization.

Order and organization can't be achieved with Bridgeport's school funding. According to the School and State Finance Project, Bridgeport spends less than similar districts and the state average with Bridgeport spending about \$14,241 per student while other schools, such as Norwalk, spend around \$17,600 per student. Bridgeport is already a low-income area, so cutting back on the school budget can affect one's desire to learn. Some may argue that increased funding won't always lead to student success. To that I say while that may be true, increased school funding has shown success in low-income areas.

According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, "Event-study and instrumental variable models reveal that a 20% increase in per pupil spending each year for all 12 years of public school for children from poor families leads to about 0.9 more years of completed education, 25% higher earnings, and a 20 percentage-point reduction in the annual incidence of adult poverty." This is important to know since it validates my point on how school funding should be increased in Bridgeport in order for student success to rise.

The reason why I'm testifying today is because I want to see a change in Bridgeport. I'm tired of seeing students drop out at a rapid rate. I'm tired of hearing that we can do it, yet have our hands tied behind our back. I'm tired of Bridgeport reeking of failure.

This is why I'm submitting written testimony today asking you to support increased funding for Bridgeport Public Schools, so students like me have a chance to learn, graduate, and succeed.

Thank you for letting me submit written testimony, and I hope you will strongly consider providing additional education funding to Bridgeport.

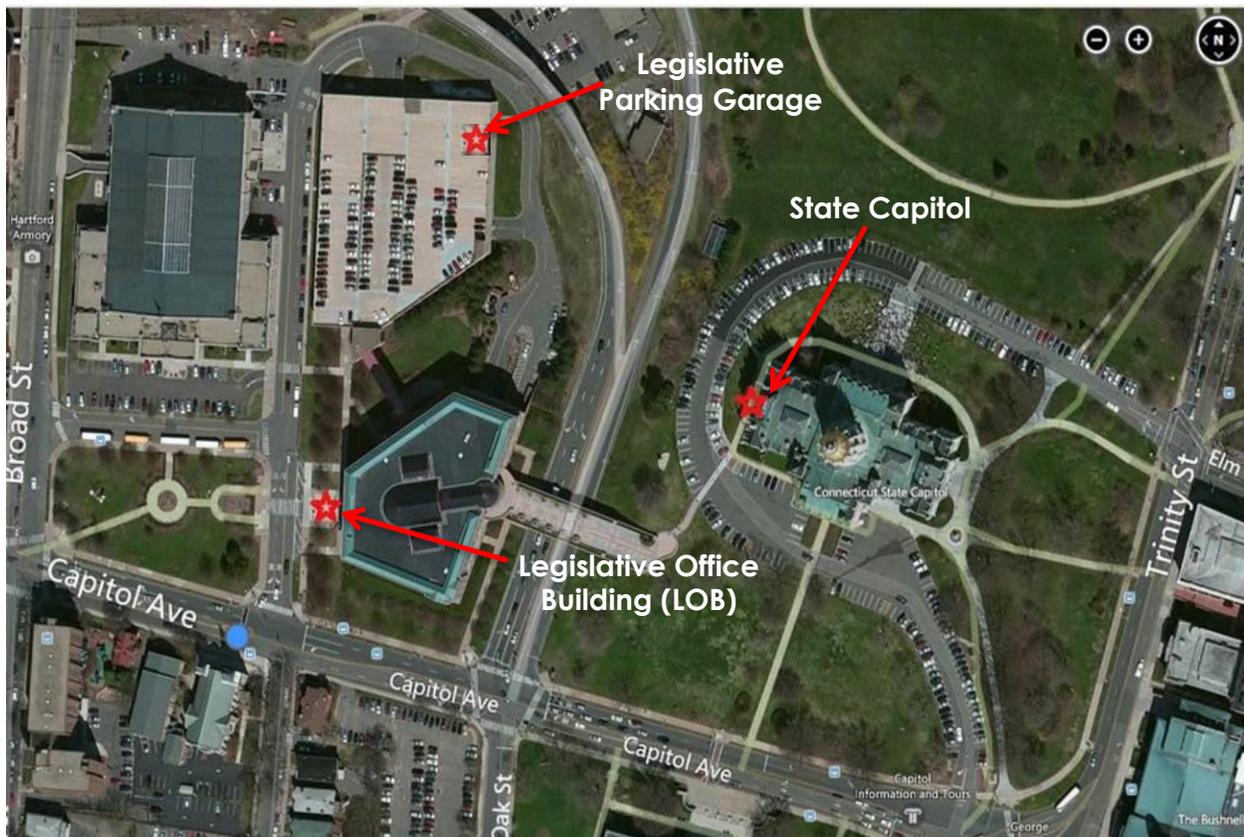
Sincerely,

Student B

The Capitol & Legislative Office Building

Legislator and staff offices are located in either the Legislative Office Building (LOB) or the State Capitol. Together, these buildings are known as the State Capitol Complex.

The public entrances are located on the west side of both buildings. Members of the public will be required to walk through a metal detector and have all property scanned through a package scanner. Please know there is a list of items prohibited from entering the State Capitol Complex, which you can find on the [Connecticut General Assembly website](#).



The Legislative Office Building (LOB)

Location: 300 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106

Traveling on I-84 East

- Take Exit 48, Capitol Avenue, and get into the right lane of the exit ramp.
- At the end of the exit ramp, turn right onto Capitol Avenue.
- Take the first right past the LOB, proceed to the back of the garage and take a right to enter the garage using the right-hand lane (visitors).

Traveling on I-84 West

- Take Exit 48, Asylum Street, and at the end of the exit ramp, turn right at the light onto Asylum Street.
- At the YWCA, turn left onto Broad Street and proceed through two stop lights. Immediately after the Armory building, take the first left and then another left at the end of the short access road.
- Follow this road around the garage to the back and take a right to enter the garage using the right-hand lane (visitors).

Traveling on I-91 North or South

- Take Exit 29A, Capitol Avenue, and proceed through the Pulaski Circle at the end of the long exit road. Take a right on Elm Street and turn left at Trinity Street.
- Go past the Capitol and the I-84 entrance ramp, all on your right.
- Take the first right past the LOB, proceed to the back of the garage, and take a right to enter the garage using the right-hand lane (visitors).

Limited public parking is available on the first floor of the Legislative Parking Garage. Exit the first floor of the parking garage and proceed to the west entrance (facing Broad Street) to the LOB.



The State Capitol

Location: 210 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106

Traveling on I-84 East

- Take Exit 48, Capitol Avenue, and get into the left lane of the exit ramp and follow the signs for Asylum Street.
- At the end of the exit ramp, turn right onto Asylum Street and continue bearing right until you come to Pulaski Circle, then take another right onto Elm Street.
- Follow Elm Street to the traffic light. At the traffic light, proceed across Trinity Street directly onto the Capitol grounds.

Traveling on I-84 West

- Take Exit 48, Asylum Street, and, at the end of the exit ramp, turn left at the traffic light onto Asylum Street.
- Get into the right lane and go under the railroad bridge.
- Continue bearing right until you come to Pulaski Circle and take another right onto Elm Street.
- Follow Elm Street to the traffic light. At the traffic light, proceed across Trinity Street directly onto the Capitol grounds.

Traveling on I-91 North or South

- Take Exit 29A, Capitol Avenue, and follow the highway along to Pulaski Circle. Go halfway around the circle and exit to the right onto Elm Street.
- Follow Elm Street to the traffic light. At the traffic light, proceed across Trinity Street directly onto the Capitol grounds.

Limited public parking is available in the spaces immediately upon entering the grounds. On-street metered parking and commercial parking lots are also nearby.

