

INTRODUCTION TO THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE



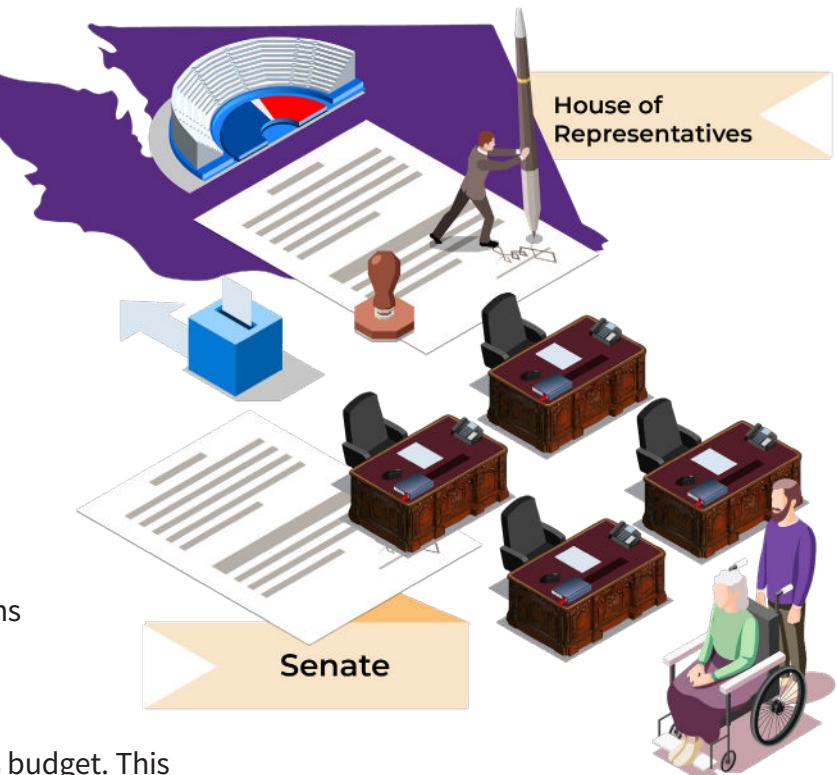
What is the State Legislature?

The Washington State Legislature has two main bodies: the lower Washington House of Representatives with 98 representatives and the upper Washington State Senate with 49 senators. Each member of the House and Senate is elected to represent a given area (called a legislative district or "LD"), in the state. You'll meet with legislators that represent your area of the state.

The primary functions of the State Legislature are to enact new laws and revise existing ones relating to the health, education, and general welfare of Washingtonians, and to make decisions that keep the state in good economic and environmental condition.

The Legislature is also responsible for the state's budget. This includes funding that affects our wages and benefits, such as the Home Care Rate, Nursing Home and Supported Living rates. Through budgeting, the legislature also decides on increases to affordable housing and rental assistance, and many other important investments the State can make in our communities.

The state legislature is not involved with Federal policy.



Who are State Legislators?

Legislators are our elected voices who represent us: their constituents (this is why it's so important that we vote in legislators who support caregivers during the election season!).

Legislators vote on a very broad range of issues—from agriculture to nursing home funding—and most are not experts on long-term care. Your legislators benefit from hearing your firsthand experience as a caregiver. If you have not met your legislator before, ask what their experience is with caregiving and be prepared to briefly explain what long-term caregiving means.

What is it like to meet with our legislators?

How long are meetings? Meetings with legislators may only last 5-10 minutes. They will usually let you know at the beginning of the meeting how much time they have.

Tips for what to say: Keep your comments brief, friendly, and personal. We want the legislator to easily be able to understand and recall our main points.

The most important thing to remember when meeting with your legislators is that you have a right to be here and have your voice heard. It is their job to meet with you and the other people in their district, to listen to your concerns, and to represent you in the legislature.

What is a Legislative Assistant?

Don't feel offended if your State Senator or Representative cannot meet with us personally. Legislators have busy schedules and sometimes get pulled away at the last minute for reasons outside of their control. Meeting with their staff can be just as effective as meeting with them. Because legislators cover so many issues, it is often the legislative staff that develop legislative agendas, draft bills, and meet with constituents like us.

