

Visiting the General Assembly of Maryland



[Interactive Map - Accessing the Legislative Complex](#)

Security in the Legislative Complex

Buildings in the capitol complex are accessible only through specified entrances. The State House has two entrances open to the public, one on the first floor and the other on the ground floor. Both are on the Lawyer's Mall side of State Circle. Visitors may enter the Miller Senate Building and the Lowe House Office Building at their main entrances on Bladen Street. The Legislative Services Building is accessible at the entrance on Lawyer's Mall.

To enter a building, visitors must present a photo identification card, such as a driver's license, and pass through a metal detector. Security officers also search bags and other personal effects. Temporary badges are then issued and must be kept visible for the duration of the visit.

Large groups should allow extra time to get through security. In order to speed up entry to the legislative complex, visitors are urged not to bring extra bags, such as backpacks, into the complex unless absolutely necessary.

Legislators and legislative staff are required to wear photo badges. Other employees of the State of Maryland are allowed access to the complex on presentation and display of their State photo badges.

Attending a Floor Session

The chambers of the Senate of Maryland and the House of Delegates are located on the first floor of the State House in the section that was completed in 1905. Each chamber's gallery, located on the second floor, is open to the public, but seating is limited and is available on a first-come-first-seated basis. Audio portions of Senate and House floor proceedings are also available via the MGA Web site.

Floor sessions usually begin at 8:00 p.m. on Monday evenings and at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. Friday floor sessions usually start at 11:00 a.m.

However, visitors should be aware that actual floor session start times may vary and that floor sessions increase in number and duration as the General Assembly moves toward the end of its 90-day deliberations. Visitors may check the “What’s Happening Now” section on the [MGA web site home page](#) for the time of the next floor session or by calling Library and Information Services.

Attending a Committee Hearing

Critical to the success of the legislative process is the work of the General Assembly's committees. Although there are several types of committees, the standing committees are the backbone of the legislative process. The four principal standing committees in the Senate and the six principal standing committees in the House consider all statewide legislation and recommend to the General Assembly which legislation should pass and which should fail. Each legislator is appointed by the President or the Speaker to serve on one principal standing committee.

The Senate’s standing committee rooms are in the Miller Senate Building. House standing committee rooms are in the House Office Building. The *Committee Meetings and Hearing Schedule*, published weekly and updated frequently, lists bills to be heard before each committee. The Hearing Schedule is available on the MGA Web site and in printed form within the capitol complex. Interested parties may also call Library and Information Services for committee meeting times and other pertinent information.

The committee process is designed to gather input from the public on bills that legislators have introduced in the General Assembly. The public is encouraged to attend hearings and offer oral and written testimony. In order to testify, before a hearing begins, witnesses must sign a witness sheet that is available in each committee room. Also, written testimony must be received by committee staff prior to the hearing.

The weekly Hearing Schedule includes the times of each committee’s hearings. Most hearings begin at 1:00 p.m. The Hearing Schedule also lists the bills to be heard, the number of copies of written testimony required, and the deadline for signing the witness sheet before a hearing begins. The committee chairs determine the order in which the bills will be heard, which may not be the order in which the bills are listed in the Hearing Schedule. The committee chairs may also limit testimony due to time constraints. Usually, the chair will call a bill’s sponsor as the first speaker, followed by proponents and opponents who have indicated a desire to testify. Committee hearings offer citizens one of the most effective opportunities to communicate their views and concerns about individual legislation. When presenting testimony:

Arrive early. Getting to a hearing early will give you the chance to sign the witness sheet and become comfortable with the surroundings.

Introduce yourself. When speaking to a committee, clearly identify yourself and the organization you represent, if any. Then clearly state your position on the bill.

Don’t be intimidated. The General Assembly of Maryland is a citizen legislature. Legislators want to hear what constituents have to say. State your case clearly and in simple terms as you would to anyone. There are no “rights or wrongs” in testifying.

Be brief. Make your points as concisely as possible, be prepared to limit your testimony if necessary, and try not to repeat testimony offered by previous witnesses. Provide specific information about your position. For example, legislators may want to know what has been done in other states, what the costs might be, and what groups support or oppose your position.

Be prepared to answer questions. The best way to make your case is to provide straightforward answers to legislators' questions. If you don't know an answer, say so. Then, if possible, find the answer and relay it later. Generally, refrain from asking questions of committee members, since public hearings are directed toward providing them with information on the legislation under consideration.

Provide summaries. A concise written summary or clearly written letter is an effective way to further explain your position. Be sure to provide the required number of copies of your written material to committee staff prior to the start of the hearing.