

PREPARING A LEGISLATIVE BILL FOR TEXAS 4-H CONGRESS

Texas 4-H Congress is based on 4-H members from across the state submitting bills for consideration by the House of Representatives and Senate, with hopes of the bill ending on the desk of the Texas 4-H Congress Governor for signage into law. This is a very serious process, because the more complete and well-written the bill is, the better chance it will have to be included in the Texas 4-H Congress Bill Book (book of all bills to be considered) and be introduced into the legislative process.

When a Texas 4-H member submits a bill it is assigned to one of seven committees for consideration. The seven legislative committee are:

- Agriculture and Livestock (AGL)
- Education (EDU)
- Energy and Environment (EEV)
- Government, Finance, & Appropriations (GFA)
- Homeland Security and Public Safety (HPS)
- Judiciary and Juvenile Justice (JJJ)
- Public Health & Welfare (PHW)

All bills submitted should be focused on issues affecting the state of Texas and county/local governments. As a bill writer, it is important to state who the bill effects and the boundaries of the potential law - does it affect Texas, or does it affect the entire country. If the legislation affects the entire United States it should not be submitted for Texas 4-H Congress.

Researching an issue for a Texas 4-H Congress Bill

Texas 4-H Congress is a mock legislative event that allows the young people of Texas to experience and learn first-hand the legislative bill process. This process can include gaining knowledge of what laws and regulations are currently in place, and those laws that would help make Texas a better place to live. The strength of the event comes from the quality of the bills that are submitted for consideration by the 4-H members. Therefore, 4-H members are encouraged to plan ahead, research, and prepare for the event.

In preparing to develop and write a bill it is important to research a topic that is personal, yet one that effects the citizens of Texas. This could include topics in the area of agriculture and livestock; education; public health and welfare; homeland security and public safety; judiciary and juvenile justice; government, finance and appropriations; or energy and environment. In researching a topic, it should be considered if an existing law or regulation is already in place that addresses the issue. If a law is not currently being enforced, then information on the cost of enacting a law, who would enforce it, and penalties for those not abiding by the law will need to be researched and decided. Each of these factors should be in line with other like laws and regulations.

As a 4-H member researches a specific bill or issue it is important to remember that Texas 4-H Congress is addressing issues impacting Texas. Issues that are more national or global should not be submitted as a bill due to the state government not being able to enforce federal laws.

All research done for a bill should be from research based sources. While personal situations can help establish the purpose of the bill, research supporting the need, the enforcement, and penalties should all come from sources that can be documented as being research based.

Preparing a Bill for Texas 4-H Congress

Once the research has been completed, the bill is ready to be written. For the purpose of Texas 4-H Congress, the following parts should be included in the bill:

- *Caption:* serves as an immediate explanation of the bill's subject matter. Should be no more than one sentence.
- *Main Object or Purpose of Bill:* this helps the reader understand the purpose of the bill, the main principle of the bill, and how important it is to the health and well-being of the state. The purpose should be no more than three or four sentences in length.
- *Definitions of Key Terms included in bill:* the author of the bill should provide a definition of terms that are used in the bill that need to be explained so the terminology supports and clarifies the purpose and intent of the bill. Definitions should be kept to one or two sentences per definition, if possible.
- *Penalties or Punishment for the Bill:* the author will need to define and list the level of the punishment (felony, misdemeanor, etc) and the level of the fines for each of the punishment levels. Penalties and punishment should be in line with similar or like laws already in place.
- *Funding Provisions for the Bill:* a detailed description should be written into the bill for any expenses it will take to enact or enforce, and where those funds will come from. If the law will generate funds, where and who (agency/department/office) will be responsible for managing the funds and/or program.

Special sections of the bill (this could be optional based on your bill)

- *Repeal of a Current Law:* based on research conducted by author it may be determined there is already a law or statute in place that needs to be repealed so this bill can take its place. This section will list the current law or statute that will be deleted. (Use actual Texas Statutes)
- *Special instructions about the enforcement and/or administration of the law:* If the bill becomes a law, are there any special rules or guidelines that will be necessary to put in place to enforce or manage the law. If so, please describe in a brief paragraph form any instructions.

Below is a sample of a bill that will be presented for consideration during Texas 4-H Congress

| | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| By: Smith, Austin County | H.B. 145 |
| By: Hill, Castro County | S.B. 245 |
| A BILL TO BE ENTITLED AN ACT | |
| non-edible plant bio-fuels. | Caption |
| BE IT ENACTED BY THE 4-H LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS | |
| Section 1. This act shall ensure that all bio-fuels are created from non-edible plant materials, so that all edible plant materials can be used solely for human consumption, and are not limited in product quantity. | Main Objective/Purpose |
| Section 2. Definitions: A. Bio-Fuels: Mixture of volatile, flammable hydrocarbons derived from plant material or animal waste and used as fuel. Some long-exploited biofuels, such as wood, can be used directly as a raw material that is burned to produce heat. | Definitions |
| Section 3. Failure to comply will result in: 1st Offense: Immediate shutdown of the plant until action has been taken to correct the offense and it has been properly inspected. 2nd Offense: Will result in the loss of government funding. | Penalties & Punishment |
| Section 4. This act shall be funded by the state government in the amount of two million dollars. | Funding Provision |
| Section 5. All laws in conflict with this act are hereby repealed. | Repealing of any current laws. |
| Section 6. This act shall become effective upon passage by the legislature and approval by the Governor, or upon its otherwise becoming a law. | Special Instructions |