

HAWAII

Your Guide To Tracking The 2017 Hawaii Legislature

The islands' 25 senators and 51 representatives will back in action before you know it. Keeping up with them is everybody's business.

JANUARY 9, 2017 • By Courtney Teague   

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Tracking what's going on during a session of the Hawaii Legislature can be daunting, especially for the uninitiated.

Lawmakers hold hundreds of hearings on thousands of bills that often change dramatically as they work their way through the political labyrinth.

It's confusing enough for people who work at the Capitol. For everyone else, figuring out what's going on can be challenging. For those who want to give input, it's just a matter of learning to navigate the state's website.



Hawaii's legislative session is scheduled to kick off Jan. 18.

Civil Beat has already written several stories about the upcoming session. You'll find them — plus all our 2017 legislative coverage to come — [here](#).

But there's likely some things about the Legislature you'll want to figure out for yourself, so you might want to bookmark the following links.

The 2017 Legislature is set to begin Jan. 18. So start planning now.

Who's Who?

Let's start at the beginning by making sure you know what legislative district you live in and who represents you in the Senate and House. Enter your street and your zip code in the search box of the [Capitol website's](#) upper right-hand corner.

Once you've got their names, you can pull up some information about your [representative](#) and [senator](#), including how to contact them.

Within their information capsules, click on their names and you'll see what committees they serve on.

There are 76 lawmakers in Hawaii — check out these lists for the [House](#) and the [Senate](#). The chairs of those committees largely determine what bills get a hearing and are approved or rejected, since committee members tend to vote with the chair.

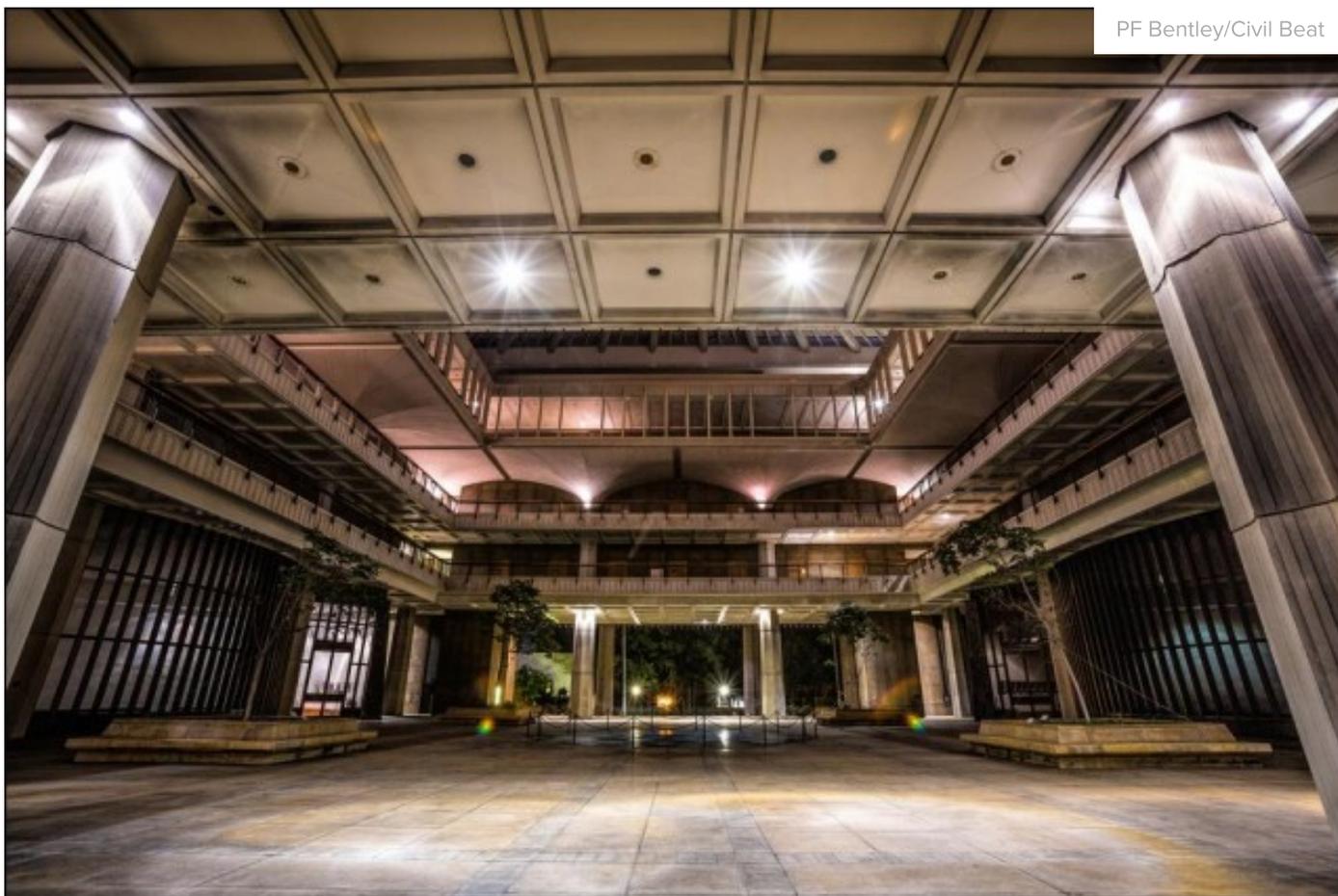
Find the House's 2017 committee chair lineup [here](#) and the Senate's assignments [here](#). Click the following links for lists of other [House](#) and [Senate](#) leadership positions.

Tracking Bills

The legislative process (both online and offline) is filled with jargon. [This glossary](#) is a must for understanding the terminology, while this [beginner's guide](#) explains how a bill might proceed all the way to becoming a law.

When searching for a bill online, everything you need is on the left side of the [Capitol's home page](#). If you're searching for a bill by number, enter it (for example, "SB123" for Senate Bill 123) in the top blue box on the left side. In the second blue box, you can search by keywords.

If you're still lost, or just looking to delve deeper, [this pictorial guide](#) will walk you through most of the website.



If you're facing the Capitol with your back to South Beretania Street, the Senate chamber is to the left and the House chamber to the right.

On the page for a particular bill, you'll see basic information at the top, including a description of the legislation and the introducer. Some bills have a "companion," which means the other legislative chamber has introduced a similar (sometimes identical) bill.

Above the name of the bill's introducer, you'll see "Current Referral" and one or more acronyms. Those abbreviations represent the committees assigned to review the bill. That means it would have to clear all those committees to proceed, but there's no guarantee it will end up getting a hearing before any of them.

Below the top section is a timeline that tracks every action related to the bill, like what committee it's headed to, when and where a hearing is scheduled, and how legislators voted on it.

If that doesn't clear things up, check the timeline to find which committee the bill is currently before. Call the committee chair's office and someone there should be able to help.

Contact information for all lawmakers can be found [here](#).

Tracking Hearings

If there's a specific bill you're interested in, check its web page for updates. Free tools, like [Visualping](#), can monitor the URL and email you when changes are posted — no account setup necessary.

The Capitol also has an email notification service and instructions are [here](#). After creating an account, sign up to follow bills or committees.

A 2017 calendar with major deadlines, including those for when legislation must have passed, is currently being finalized. During the session, you can find an updated calendar [here](#).

To search for hearings by date or bill, use the search boxes on the left side of the Capitol's homepage that are below the two that allow you to search for bills.

The last blue box that says "Order of the Day" will show a list of agenda items being discussed and often voted on. Sixty "session days" are held every year, which means all lawmakers are together on the chamber floor.

If You Go

If you can make it to the Capitol, the Public Access Room (401) has plenty of resources for learning about legislation or testifying.

Public parking meters in the Capitol basement take quarters only, though spots are often difficult to come by. On the fourth floor, look for a door propped open next to a stand with handouts. The Public Access Room has extended hours during the session, from 7:45 a.m. to 6 p.m.

The handouts available there include a map of the Capitol and list of lawmakers by their office number.

There are tables, supplies, desktop computers, a phone and printers and scanners for those researching legislative materials. The staff allows you to print up to 15 pages, front and back, and the room has a wheelchair-accessible computer station.



Take the elevator to the fourth floor to find the Public Access Room (401). Elevators and stairs are in all four corners of the Capitol building.

A bookshelf contains volumes of Hawaii law and session reports from recent years, and older volumes are available upon request. At the tables, outlets and USB plugs are provided for charging electronic devices. A television facing the tables streams hearings.

You can set up an appointment for an hour-long workshop on the legislative process, although PowerPoint presentations are available [online](#). The Public Access Room has online resources [here](#) for those looking to prepare at home, like [this tip sheet](#) for first-time testifiers.

[This page](#) has resources for updated 2017 legislative schedules, seating charts and committee assignments.

It's recommended that you submit testimony online and specify whether you plan to speak at the hearing. [Here's how](#).

When hearings are especially crowded, lawmakers may ask that testifiers speak for a maximum of one minute. Be prepared to list your top points first just in case, but remember lawmakers have your full testimony if you've submitted a copy.

Late testimony is accepted, but try to submit it at least 24 hours before the hearing. If you're unsure of what to write, [here's a template](#).

When testifying, the committee usually asks you to state your name and the group you're affiliated with, if any. Many people testify as private citizens without ties to any organization.

Unless a major bill is being heard and there's lots of last-minute testifiers, lawmakers call the names of people who submitted testimony and indicated they intended to speak at the hearing.

If you forget to send testimony, don't worry — lawmakers should accommodate everyone who wants to speak.

If You Don't Go

Heading to the Capitol is the best way to stay engaged, but lawmakers often meet during the day. You may work a 9-to-5 job. You may not live on Oahu. Fortunately, there are other ways to follow meetings.

Earlier this year, Olelo [rolled out](#) the Hawaii State Public Access Network. HSPAN is an on-demand service that streams hearings for Oceanic Time Warner Cable customers on Channel 50.

[Olelo](#) streams legislative content and neighborhood board meetings on Channel 49, while Honolulu City Council and neighborhood board meetings are on Channel 54.

There's also [Capitol TV](#), a site that streams Olelo channels, and Olelo's [online archives](#). Unfortunately, Olelo can take weeks to upload videos to its archives.

If you're active on Facebook and Twitter, you might want to search for lawmakers, state departments or political groups. By "liking" or "following" those pages, you can be updated on certain issues, bills or hearing dates.

On Twitter, the hashtag #HILeg is often used for legislative news, though #Hlgov and #HInews are also commonly used.

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