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I'm Just A Bill....A Guide to the Legislative Process

A bill is an idea put into proper legislative form and is the document that drives the legislative branch. This document aims to create new laws, or add to, repeal, or amend (change) current laws. You may also write a Constitutional Amendment. This is a bill that proposes a change to the State Constitution.

View a great video on Youtube and watch "I'm Just A Bill" from School House Rocks!

Now, we're going to briefly look at the process of bill topic selection.

There are a lot of topics out there that you can choose from. Your goal should be to find a topic that you feel passionate about. Whether your interests lie in the environment, business, education, or social programs, your bill should be about something that you believe in.

Here are some other important tips to keep in mind when brainstorming topics:

- One of the simplest and most accessible sources of current information is the newspaper. Whether it's *The Cary News* or *The New York Times*, a newspaper can give you a good idea of current buzz
- Use the internet to search some ideas that interest you and see what comes up
- Interview prominent people in the community, such as city officials, teachers, business leaders, social workers, ministers, etc. Get their views on which issues they feel need legislative attention
- Consider any condition which exists in your school, family or community. Then do some research to see if the issue extends to the rest of the state
- Remember your bill needs to address a **STATE**, not a **FEDERAL**, issue
- Your topic should be something that could really work and not just a daydream. Sometimes great ideas don't make great bills because they just aren't practical

Do not be worried if you are stumped at this point. Your advisors and fellow members of your delegation can always help you come up with ideas.

The next sheet should be useful in looking at what is important in North Carolina and topics to get you started! Hopefully you can find a few that stand out to you.



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Bill Topic Ideas

CIVIL & CRIMINAL JUSTICE

- Alternatives to incarceration – community based supervision, drug treatment programs, etc.
- Human trafficking
- Body-worn cameras & law enforcement
- Reform of minimum sentencing guidelines – non-violent infractions, drug crimes, first time offense, etc.

EDUCATION

- Class size
- Digital learning – technology in the classroom
- School calendar – before and after school programs, extended day, four-day school weeks, later start times, summer classes, weekend classes, year round
- School choice – charter schools, home schooling, private school vouchers, virtual education

ELECTIONS

- Early voting
- Independent vs. political redistricting
- Non-partisan vs. partisan judicial races
- Voter identification

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

- Air and water quality
- Composting, landfills, and recycling
- Energy efficiency – including building code standards
- Hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) & off-shore drilling
- Renewable energy – solar & wind

FISCAL POLICY

- Public private partnerships
- Crowdfunding

GOVERNMENT REGULATION

- Regulation of the shared economy – do transportation and labor laws apply to Uber drivers? Should the state regulate Airbnb?
- Marijuana – decriminalization, taxation, public safety, prevention, medical, recreational
- Gambling – internet, sports, fantasy sports



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HEALTH CARE

- Opioids and drug use
- Certifications and licensing

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

- Broadband / rural internet access
- Collection and sale of personal data
- Social media privacy – should an employer or educational institution be allowed to have access to employees' or students' social media accounts?
- Digital assets after death

LABOR & EMPLOYMENT

- Collective bargaining – unions, collection of dues, right-to-work, strikes
- Minimum wage
- Workplace drug testing

MILITARY & VETERANS AFFAIRS

- Returning veterans – resources to smooth transition into civilian life
- Occupational licensing – should occupational licensing and certification laws apply to military personnel with the proper training from time spent in service?

TRANSPORTATION

- Autonomous Vehicles
- Electric Vehicles
- Traffic Safety – impaired driving, aggressive driving, driver licenses, distracted driving, older drivers, teen drivers
- Unmanned Aircrafts (drones) – commercial use, personal use, public safety



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Top Five Criteria for Selection of Bills

1. **How Well the Bill is Written:** Bills should strictly follow the bill template. Excessively short, poorly worded, and grammatically incorrect bills are typically tossed aside early on. These bills will not count towards the requirement of submitting a bill. As such, those bill authors will not be eligible to attend the conference.
2. **Importance to the State of North Carolina:** While installing a stop light near your neighborhood that intersects a major road may be important to you, it is most likely not important to the rest of the state. Think bigger than that. It may be that there are neighborhoods like yours all over the state that need similar laws passed. Do the research and find out if your community issue can be translated into a statewide issue.
3. **Originality:** Every year there are multiple bills written on abortion, same-sex marriage, old people driving, etc. While these are “hot topic” issues, they can become tiresome if presented in the same way. If you are going to write your bill on a popular topic, then you need to make sure you bring new ideas to the table.
4. **“Debatability”:** While it may not be a word, “debatability” is extremely pertinent when it comes to bill selection. Very few people want to debate a bill about what color fire hydrants should be. While that is an interesting subject and some discussion could arise, that type of bill doesn’t elicit the type of debate we strive for at the conference.
5. **Relevance:** This criterion really focuses on how current the bill idea is. Bills will not be chosen if they match up with existing North Carolina law. Current events are always welcomed topic areas.



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How to Write a Bill

Now that you have an idea and the information to develop it, you can begin to put it into bill form. This means actually wording it the specific way it will appear at the YMCA NC Youth Legislature. Drafting a bill in the proper form is crucial to getting it passed by the legislature. **Just follow the template below and when complete visit nycag.org for instructions how to submit your bill.**

Introduced by: *(List all names of bill authors)*

Delegation: *(This is formatted as your YMCA and delegation. If you are not part of a YMCA, just list the delegation)*

Purpose: *(This section simply states why this bill is written. What does this bill hope to accomplish?)*

Action Clause: **BE IT ENACTED BY THE YMCA NORTH CAROLINA YOUTH LEGISLATURE**

(The above phrase must be on every bill, directly above Section 1)

Section Formatting: *(Formatting for every section is the same. Refer to the Sample Bill to see exactly what this looks like. Starting with the Action Clause, there should be a line space between every section. Each section should be listed with a number and followed by a period, i.e. Section 1. or Section 2. There should be one space between the section number and the first word of the section, i.e. Section 1. A tool shall...)*

Definitions: *(Throughout your bill, you may find it necessary to define any terms which are key to the bill. Remember that this is a law and will need to be interpreted by law enforcement. Thus, it is important for the language of the bill to be as clear as possible)*

Penalties: *(You will need to state what penalty, if any, would be applied to someone who is in violation of your new law. Penalties can take many forms, and are often related to the intent of the bill. Please note that penalties are not a requirement for bills)*

Funding: *(One of the great things about the YMCA NC Youth Legislature is that we do not use funding as a consideration for bill selection or passage. We prefer students debate about content rather than appropriations. Money is only necessary for your bill if you are using it in relation to penalties)*

Effective Date: *(This is the date on which your bill takes effect. Some can go into effect immediately (“upon passage”) while others will take time to implement. If you decide that you want to have a specific effective date for your bill, please note that the date must be after February 2019)*

As you are preparing your bill, please keep in mind that your bill should be no more than 2 typed pages in length. It is recommended that you get feedback on your bill throughout the brainstorming and writing stages. See Bill Feedback for support – GOOD LUCK!



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Bill Feedback

Once your bill is written out, and throughout the course of the bill writing process, it is recommended that you use this handout to gather the best feedback for your bill. Have a peer, teacher, parent, attorney, etc. answer the following questions about your bill to determine if you are on the right track.

1. As far as you know, is this bill in conflict with the State Constitution, Federal Constitution, or Federal Law? If yes, please explain.

2. Does the responsibility for this bill fall to the state government, or is it a local or federal concern?

3. As far as you know, is this bill already a law in North Carolina?

4. Does this bill affect the entire state of North Carolina or only a portion? Explain.

5. Does the timeline for when this bill would take effect seem reasonable? Explain.

6. Is this bill “debatable”?



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BILL BOOT CAMP SLIDES

TOPIC SELECTION TIPS

GENERAL TIPS:

- ✓ Make sure your topic is one that interests you – once you submit your bill, you cannot change topics!
- ✓ You want your bill to be debatable and something that you can gather plenty of research on.
- ✓ Consider the real life feasibility of your bill – if it became law, would it be possible to implement and enforce it?
- ✓ Your bill topic must fall under the powers of the state – it cannot change federal law or the U.S. Constitution.

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TOPIC SELECTION TIPS

BRAINSTORMING YOUR BILL TOPIC:

- ✓ Consider what ideas, if passed, would improve the lives of North Carolinians.
- ✓ Read the newspaper or watch the local news.
- ✓ Ask your parents, friends, or teachers for ideas
- ✓ Look at what bills were considered during this year's North Carolina legislative session:
<http://www.ncleg.net/gascripts/applications/KeywordReports/> (type in a keyword such as education or transportation)
- ✓ Look at what laws exist in other states that do not exist in North Carolina.

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CRAFTING YOUR BILL

- ✓ Use the YAG-provided template.
- ✓ Once you finish writing your bill, have someone else read it to ensure that your bill is substantive, concise, makes sense, and does not contain any misspellings or grammatical errors.
- ✓ Take some time to consider how you can craft an innovative but feasible solution to your issue.
- ✓ Make sure your bill will have an impact on citizens across the state, not just in your school or your hometown.
- ✓ Your bill cannot change any policies that fall under the control of the federal government.

ARTICULATING YOUR ARGUMENT

- ✓ Gather stats, facts, and anecdotes to back up your bill.
- ✓ Familiarize yourself with parliamentary procedure.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- ✓ What is the impact to North Carolinians if my bill becomes law? Why is my bill needed?
- ✓ What is the impact to North Carolinians if my bill DOES NOT become law?
- ✓ Who will oppose my bill? What will the arguments be against my bill?