COBELL DAY · NOVEMBER 5, 2026

Your Voice in Helena



A student guide to the 2027 Montana Legislature

Jan 4, 2027
The 70th Legislative session convenes at noon in Helena

90
Legislative days, at most, to pass bills

2 min
About how long you get to testify

Why we made this

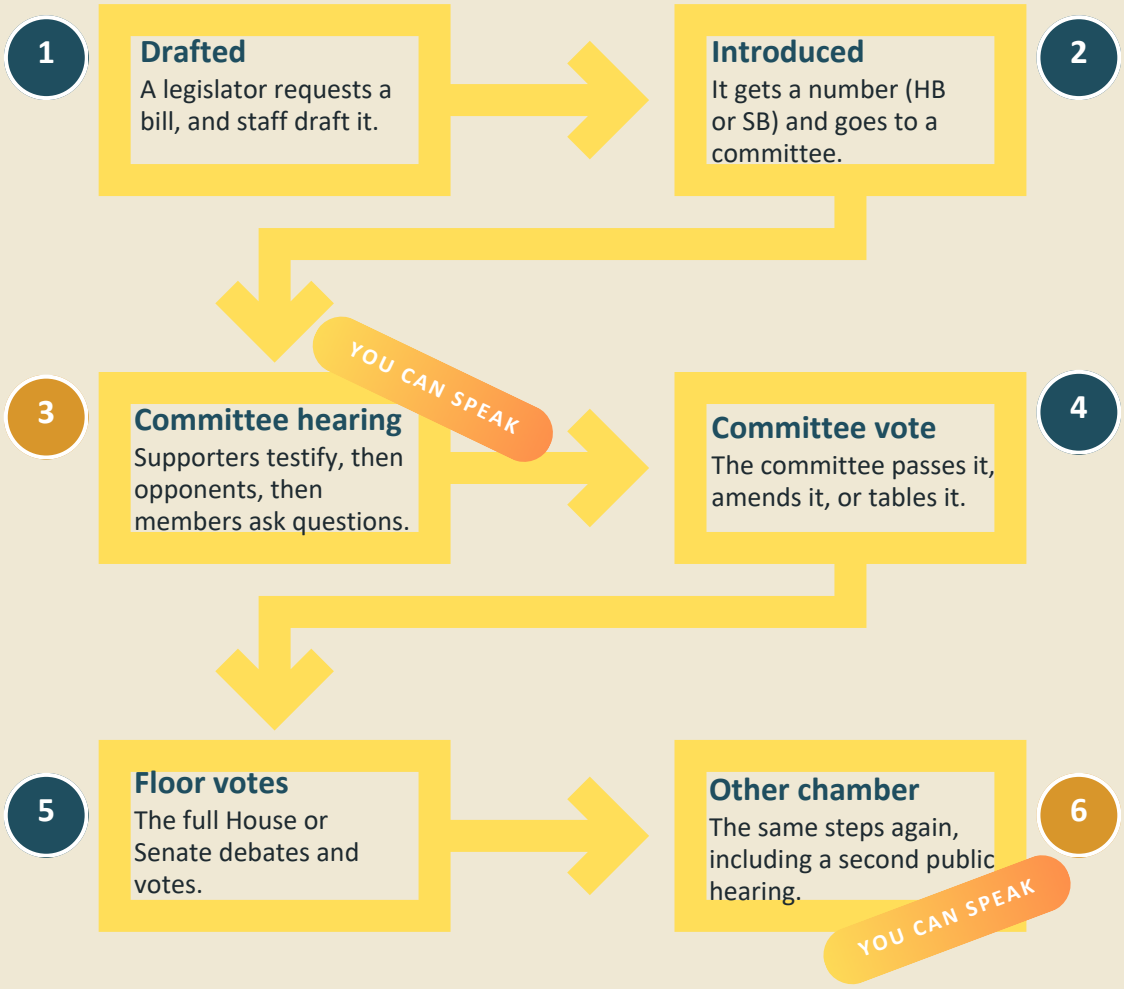
You do not need to be a lawyer, a lobbyist, or a political science major to be heard in Helena. Most of us had never set foot in the Capitol before our first hearing. It turns out the process is more open than it looks from the outside.

Eloiuse Cobell was a Blackfeet banker who spent more than 13 years making the federal government account for money it held in trust for Native people. She did not start out as an activist. She started out asking questions nobody wanted to answer. In 1996, she sued the federal government on behalf of hundreds of thousands of Native people whose trust accounts had been mismanaged for more than a century. The case settled in 2009 for $3.4 billion, which funded payments to account holders, a program to return fractionated land to Tribal Nations, and a scholarship for Native students. She passed away in 2011, but her questions still shape how governments answer to Native people.This guide is about learning to ask those questions in Helena.

This guide is nonpartisan. It explains how to take part, not what to support. When you testify or write to legislators, you speak for yourself, not for the University.

AMERICAN INDIAN GOVERNANCE AND POLICY INSTITUTE
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

How a bill moves



The committee hearing is YOUR moment. A bill that passes one chamber will get a second hearing in the other, so you often get two chances to speak.

7

Governor

Signs it, vetoes it, or lets it become law without a signature.

Find your legislators and follow bills

Every Montanan has one state senator and one state representative. Whow is yours?

Find your district. Use the district lookup at leg.mt.gov. Registered to vote in Missoula? Use your Missoula address. Registered at home? Those legislators are yours too.

Search bills. The Legislature's bill system lets you search by number, keyword, or sponsor and sign up for updates.

Use Capitol Tracker. Montana Free Press publishes an easier-to-read tracker of bills, lawmakers, and votes each session.

Follow student reporters. UM's Legislative News Service sends journalism students to cover the Capitol every session.

Watch. Hearings stream live and are recorded on the Legislature's website.

Five ways to be heard

Take part from Helena, from your dorm, or from your phone. In-person testimony carries the most weight, but every format goes on the record.

		EFFORT
Testify in person	Go to the hearing in Helena and add your name to the sign-up sheet when you arrive.	Highest
Testify remotely	Register on the Legislature's Public Participation portal and testify by Zoom.	Medium
Written comment	Submit comments or documents on a bill to a committee through the same portal.	Low
Short message	Send up to 1,000 characters to a whole committee or up to five legislators.	Lowest
Phone message	Call (406) 444-4800 and leave a message for a legislator.	Lowest

Your two-minute testimony

2:00

Plan on about two minutes. Each committee sets its own limits, depending on how many people want to speak. Use this simple structure.

1 Introduce yourself

"Chair [name] and members of the committee, my name is ___, and [I'm a student at the University of Montana/a concerned parent/active public land user/etc.] from ___."

2 Name the bill and your position

Say the bill number and whether you support or oppose it.

3 Tell them why

Use your own experience. Your story is the evidence nobody else can give.

4 Make one clear ask

Say what you want the committee to do, then thank them for their time.

Tips from people who've done it

- **You don't have to be an expert.** Legislators hear from experts all day. They hear from students far less often.
- **Write it out and time it.** Two minutes goes fast. Practice out loud at least once.
- **Leave a written copy.** Hand it in or upload it, so your words stay in the record even if time runs short.
- **Sign up early to testify remotely.** In 2025, the deadline was 2 hours before the hearing, and each Zoom link worked for one person and one meeting. Check the 2027 rules.
- **Test your tech.** Check Zoom, your microphone, and your connection before the hearing starts.
- **Speak for yourself.** Not for UM, a club, or a Tribe, unless you've been asked to represent them.

Tribal Nations and the Legislature

Montana is home to eight federally recognized Tribal Nations, and many bills each session touch Tribal lands, children, health, education, and resources. Eloise Cobell's case was about what happens when a government makes decisions about Native people without asking them or answering to them. That question still comes up in Helena.

When you follow a bill, ask:

- ? Does this bill affect Tribal citizens, Tribal lands, or Tribal governments?
- ? Were Tribal Nations consulted before it was written?
- ? Who testified, and whose voices are missing from the hearing?

Tribal governments speak for themselves, government to government. As a student, you can still show up, listen, and share how a bill would affect you, your family, or your community.

Where to learn more

Montana Legislature: Participate
Official portal for testimony, comments, and messages

ACLU of Montana
Engaging in the Legislative Process: a step-by-step guide

Montana Women Vote
“How to Show Up for the Legislature” trainings

Montana Budget & Policy Center
A remote testimony checklist and video

Montana Free Press Capitol Tracker
Bills, lawmakers, and votes in plain language

Session rules can change. Check leg.mt.gov once the 2027 session begins.