

NARSOL'S Arkansas affiliate leader a regular at legislative sessions

written by admin | March 25, 2019



By [John Moritz](#) . . . Carla Swanson sat waiting for nearly two hours Tuesday, watching as the House Judiciary Committee deliberated one bill after another.

The lawmakers discussed legislation affecting the implementation of the death penalty, then turned to a bill dealing with child custody laws. Members later took up two bills that would raise court fees. About an hour in, Swanson, who attends nearly every committee meeting to argue against proposals that would add restrictions on registered sex offenders like her son, heard the chairman call up one of the four bills she had been waiting on.

But before she had a chance to speak against the bill – which proposes to keep sex offenders from working at police and fire departments – Swanson watched as the sponsor pulled down the bill to fix a drafting error.

Swanson kept waiting.

The regular session of the Legislature has passed its two-month mark, and dozens of bills are on some committees' public agendas. Some lawmakers and public advocates have begun to question whether more can be done to let people know more precisely when a bill they are interested in will be discussed.

In the Arkansas Legislature, committee meetings are generally the only place where members of the public, lobbyists and other officials can offer public comments on bills before they are sent to the floor of either chamber, where debate is limited to lawmakers.

When a bill is assigned to a committee, it is placed on that committee's public agenda, which is published before each meeting. Any bill on the regular agenda has the potential to be considered at any committee meeting, but some bills linger for weeks or even months before the sponsor asks the committee to act on the bill. Only bills set for a special order of business – bills that tend to be more controversial pieces of legislation – have a set date for a hearing.

Of the more than 1,500 bills and almost 170 resolutions that have been filed since the Legislature convened in mid-January, just 31 have been scheduled for special orders, according to a full review of committee agendas by the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. (A 2,049-page government reorganization bill, House Bill 1763, was originally filed as 16 separate bills, each of which received a special order of business, before being rolled up into one bill, which was also considered on special order. This newspaper's count of bills that received special orders counts HB1763 once.)

So far, 515 bills have been signed into law.

[Read the full article here at the Arkansas Democrat Gazette.](#)