

GET INVOLVED!

How Our Government Works & How To Make Government Work For You



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Area 4 Board is a federally-funded state agency that protects and advocates for the rights of people who have developmental disabilities and their families in Napa, Solano, and Sonoma Counties.

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*How Our Government Works &
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Words to Know

WHAT CAN GOVERNMENT DO FOR YOU?



It's important for you to know about the things our government does and how it works because the government has a big impact on your life. The government makes **laws**, collects **taxes**, and decides what **services** to spend money on.

Here are some examples of **laws** that the government has made:

- * laws that say kids who have disabilities have the right to go to school with kids who don't have disabilities;
- * a law that says people in California have to wear helmets when they ride a motorcycle or a bike; and
- * the Lanterman Act which set up Regional Centers and Area Boards.

The government spends **tax** money on **services** like parks, libraries, Regional Centers, schools, police and fire, busses, SSI (Supplemental Security Income), Medi-Cal, and much more.

WHAT CAN GOVERNMENT DO?



Government is the people and the agencies that manage, or run, our country, states, counties, and cities. The job of the government is to make sure things run smoothly and safely, and to make sure that people get help when they need it.

In the United States, we have a *representative government*. That means that we vote for who we want our government leaders to be, and those leaders are supposed to represent, or stand up for, the things that are important to us. Some of the leaders we elect, or vote for, are: President, Senators, Congressmembers, Governor, State Senators, Assemblymembers, County Supervisors, and City Council Members. These are our *elected representatives*.

Elected representatives make decisions about what new laws to make, how much taxes to collect, and what programs and services tax money will be spent on.

WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR YOUR GOVERNMENT?

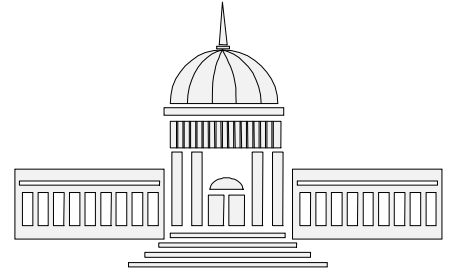


So you know that the government does a lot for people. Did you know that you can do things for the government?

You can tell people in government about the things that are important to you and what they can do to help you. This is called *advocating*. Advocating is an important way for you to be involved in government and get the services you need. Your elected representatives need to hear from you so they know what you think of their decisions. Elected representatives cannot do a good job representing you if they don't know what's important to you.

Another way to be involved with our government is by voting. *Voting* means to make choices. You can vote for who you want your representatives to be. You can also vote about some new laws. Voting is an important right for people in the United States. By voting, you participate in your government, you help decide who the leaders in government are, and you choose what the government should work on and spend money on.

HOW OUR GOVERNMENT IS SET UP



Since the government does a lot of different things for people, and since you have the right to tell the government what you think by advocating and voting, it's helpful to understand how the government in our country works. There are four kinds of government in our country and each has a different job to do.

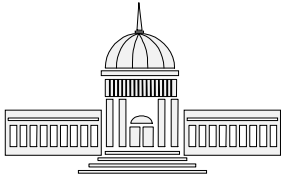
THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The federal government works for all of the people who live in the United States. The capital of the United States is Washington D.C. This is where the leaders of the federal government do most of their work.



The **President** is the leader of the Executive Branch of the Federal Government. The President is responsible for making sure that laws of the United States are carried out. The President makes agreements with other countries. The President is responsible for the armed forces (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines). The President nominates (suggests) people to lead government departments (agencies). We can vote for who we want to be president every four years.

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HOW OUR GOVERNMENT IS SET UP



The **Legislative Branch** of the Federal Government is called Congress. Congress writes laws for the country and collects taxes. Congress is made up of two parts: the Senate and the House of Representatives. There are 100 Senators who serve 6-year terms. There are 435 Congressmembers who are elected every two years. It was the United States Congress that wrote the law that said kids who have disabilities have the right to go to school with kids who do not have disabilities. The Congress also passed the Americans with Disabilities Act which says that busses, public buildings, and many other places have to be accessible to people who have disabilities. These laws affect everyone who lives in the United States.

The federal court system makes up the **Judicial Branch** of the Federal Government. The courts are responsible for making sure that laws are fair. Courts are also responsible for having trials for people who are accused of breaking laws. The Supreme Court is the highest court in the United States. There are other federal courts below the Supreme Court. We do not vote for who will be on the Supreme Court or any other federal judges. The President nominates (suggests) people to be Supreme Court Justices and federal judges, and the Senate can either approve or reject the President's suggestions.



HOW OUR GOVERNMENT IS SET UP

CALIFORNIA STATE GOVERNMENT

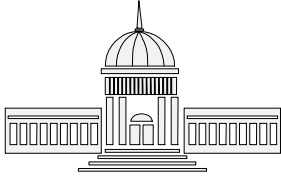
The California state government works for all of the people who live in our state. The capital of our state is Sacramento.

The leader of the **Executive Branch** of state government is the **Governor**. The Governor is responsible for making sure the laws for California are carried out. The Governor represents our state's interests with other states and with the federal government. The Governor sends suggestions for laws and the state budget to the state lawmakers. We vote for Governor every 4 years.



In California, the Legislative Branch is called the **State Legislature**. The Legislature passes laws that affect people who live in California. The Legislature has two parts: the Senate and the Assembly. There are 40 Senators who are elected every four years. There are 80 Assemblymembers who are elected every two years. One of the laws that the California Legislature passed is the Lanterman Act, which set up Regional Centers and Area Boards. Other states do not have a Lanterman Act.

The highest court in our state's **Judicial Branch** is the California Supreme Court. Our state also has a Court of Appeals. The state courts are responsible for making sure that our state's laws are fair. The courts also have trials for people who are accused of breaking laws. The Governor nominates (suggests) people to become Supreme Court Justices, and voters can confirm (approve) the Justices that the Governor nominates. Supreme Court Justices serve 12-year terms.



HOW OUR GOVERNMENT IS SET UP

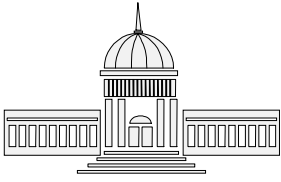
COUNTY GOVERNMENT

There are 58 different counties in California. San Joaquin is a county. Stockton is a county (and also a city).

Each county has a Board of Supervisors who are responsible for the laws and budget for the county. There are 5 county Supervisors who are elected to serve for 4 years. Supervisors are elected by the people who live in that county. Supervisors pass laws that affect the people who live in that county and decide on the budgets for their counties. Some of the things that counties pay for are IHSS (In-Home Support Services), mental health services, and sheriffs services.

Counties have their own court system made up of superior and municipal courts. We vote for county judges every six years.





HOW OUR GOVERNMENT IS SET UP

CITY GOVERNMENT

There are more than 470 different cities in California. City Government is often called "local government". Each city has its own form of government. There is often a City Council that is elected by the people who live in that city. There may be a Mayor who is elected by the people who live in the city. The City Council makes laws that affect people who live in that city and decides on the city's budget. Some of the things that cities pay for are police, busses, some parks, and some animal shelters. Cities do not have their own court system.

