

THE NEVADA LEGISLATURE'S CONSTITUENT SERVICES UNIT

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Context

- The Nevada Legislature meets every two years
- Consists of 63 members (42 Assembly members, 21 Senators)
- Between sessions, members have no district or personal staff—1 secretary for 6 months during session

Background and History

- The Constituent Services Unit (CSU) formed in 1999 in response to demand by legislators for additional assistance
- Volume of constituent-related calls became difficult to handle for analysts and committee staff during legislative session
- One person very good at quick turn-around requests assigned—now the manager of the unit
- CSU staff during legislative sessions: 14 (including support staff), with 12 in Carson City and 2 in Las Vegas

Intake Process

- Session years: about 80 percent of requests from legislators
- 20 percent transfers from State Operator, referred from main Research Division, cold calls/e-mails from the public
- Non Session years: 60% legislator 40% other
- Sources: Legislators, e-mails to our division's generic e-mail, Research Library, State Operator, cold calls
- Enter into Database, allows for mail-merge mass responses if needed
- Nearly entire process is electronic, including editing

What services are provided?

In general, CSU provides:

- Assistance to legislators concerning constituents who write or call with problems or questions
- Information for legislative constituents regarding the Legislature and state government
- Assistance to constituents in resolving matters with government agencies (federal, state, and local)
- Meeting with constituent groups

What services are provided?

(continued)

Products include:

- Letters
- E-mail responses (can send as though it is coming directly from Legislator's e-mail)
- Telephone calls
- Speeches and talking points
- Newsletter articles
- Letters of recommendation or nomination
- Proclamations and various other items

Level of Service

- Everything from assisting legislator's session personal secretaries with designing form letter replies, to something resembling case work (requiring release forms, etc.)
- While we can provide general information about the state law, persons seeking legal advice are advised to contact an attorney

Resources

- Personal contacts within agencies
- Various ombudsmen offices at state and local level
- CSU compiles its own services directory for Las Vegas and surrounding county

Challenges

- Often, the constituent cannot be helped further
- Separating requests for policy information versus true constituent assistance
- The usual challenges for legislative staff:
 - ▣ Communication issues
 - ▣ Deadlines
 - ▣ Separating political campaigning from standard legislator duties

Best Practices

- Internal “Wiki” pages – recurring subjects including:
 - Budget & Taxes
 - Common Interest Communities (H.O.A.s)
 - Concealed Weapons/Firearms
 - Elections including Ballot Measures
 - Foreclosure/Home Financing Issues
 - Health Care and Health Care Reform
- Resource bank – Allows for quick turn-around of basic information requests on popular topics