

SEAL-EARNING UNIT

Unit 2: Policy Advocacy Through a Bill (High School Civics Project)

Subject	Civics, Government, Research, Persuasive Writing
Grade Level	9-12
Possible Seal Credit	New York High School Civics Project, 1.5 points (Civic Participation; may be earned twice in grades 9-12). Rhode Island student-led civics project. Connecticut portfolio evidence.
Time Allotment	5 to 6 weeks, one 45-minute class or delegation meeting per week plus independent work. Fits between the delegation's first meeting and its bill deadline.
Youth and Government Process Practiced	Bill writing against the original law, the memorandum of support, committee presentation, and communicating a recommendation to real officials.
The Project Standard	New York's High School Civics Project asks students to focus on a civic issue in a policy area, analyze data and sources, evaluate at least two current public policies, recommend strategies, communicate the project in writing, audio/visual or oral form, and explain how it changed their civic knowledge, skills and mindsets. A Youth and Government bill with a memorandum of support, sent to a real legislator, is designed to cover those elements.

Learning Objectives:

- ▶ Students will be able to state a policy issue in one sentence and identify the level of government responsible.
- ▶ Students will be able to find and read the current law or policy and explain in plain language what it does and does not do.
- ▶ Students will be able to research at least two existing solutions from other jurisdictions and evaluate them.
- ▶ Students will be able to write a bill in Youth and Government format that amends the real law and a memorandum of support that argues from evidence.
- ▶ Students will be able to present the bill in committee and deliver the recommendation to at least one official with authority, and record the response.

Materials:

- ▶ Handout: "Original Law Worksheet" (Supporting Document 1)
- ▶ Handout: "Memorandum of Support Template" (Supporting Document 2)
- ▶ Handout: "Cover Letter to an Official" (Supporting Document 3)
- ▶ Handout: "Policy Advocacy Rubric" (see Assessment section)
- ▶ Youth and Government bill template for the student's state (NY, CT or RI version; the format is the same: title, sponsors, enacting clause, purpose, definitions,

provisions with underlines and strikeouts, justification, fiscal implications, environmental implications, effective date)

- ▶ Online access to the state's consolidated laws and the legislature's bill search

Pre-Planning:

- ▶ Confirm with the Seal Committee that this unit will be accepted as a High School Civics Project and whether the student has used one of the two allowed instances already.
- ▶ Students work alone or in pairs. Each student submits an individual memorandum and cover letter.
- ▶ Pull the delegation's calendar so the bill is finished before the delegation's internal deadline.

▲ Week 1: The Issue and the Level of Government (45 minutes)

- 1. (10 minutes) Which government?** Teach the fast sort: schools and school boards (district policy), towns and counties (local code), the state (state law, which is what Youth and Government bills amend), the federal government. A student who picks a federal issue writes a resolution or a memorial instead of a bill; redirect them to a state or local version of the same problem where possible.
- 2. (20 minutes) Issue statements:** Each student writes the issue in one sentence with a number in it if possible ("Students in our district can be suspended for up to 20 days with no required instruction"). Pair share and sharpen.
- 3. (15 minutes) Find the law:** Model a search of the state's consolidated laws. Students locate the section that governs their issue and begin the Original Law Worksheet. Homework: finish the worksheet.

▲ Week 2: Evaluate the Current Policy (45 minutes)

- 1. (15 minutes) What the law actually does:** Students explain their section to a partner in plain language without reading it aloud. The partner writes down what they understood. Gaps between the two are the lesson.
- 2. (20 minutes) Policy evaluation:** Three questions: Is the current law achieving its purpose (evidence)? Who is harmed by the gap (evidence)? What has been tried (bill search for prior bills on the topic; note their sponsors and fate)?
- 3. (10 minutes) Prior bills log:** Students record at least one bill previously introduced on their topic in their state, with bill number, year and status. If none exists, that is itself a finding.

▲ Week 3: Research Solutions (45 minutes)

- 1. (25 minutes) Two other jurisdictions:** Find how two other states, districts or towns handle the issue. Record the citation, the approach, and any reported result. Reputable sources: the National Conference of State Legislatures, state education departments, legislative research offices, major news.
- 2. (15 minutes) Choose and justify:** Pick the approach to adopt or adapt. Write a paragraph: why this one, what it would cost, who would object.

3. **(5 minutes) Advisor check** on the worksheet and the two precedents.

▲ **Week 4: Write the Bill and the Memorandum (45 minutes plus homework)**

1. **(10 minutes) The marking rule, with real text:** Paste the actual section into the bill template. Underline every added word; strike every removed word. Nothing underlined or struck means it is not a bill.
2. **(25 minutes) Draft:** Purpose, definitions, provisions, justification (from Week 2 and Week 3 evidence), fiscal implications (with a number and a source, or a reasoned estimate), environmental implications, effective date.
3. **(10 minutes) Memorandum of Support:** Begin the template. Homework: finish both; peer format check using the Seal of State Approval checklist (Storybook County Lesson 1, Writing a Bill).

▲ **Week 5: Committee and Delivery (45 minutes)**

1. **(30 minutes) Delegation committee:** Full Youth and Government hearing format. Record the technical questions asked and the strongest con argument; these go into the memorandum's "Arguments Against and Responses" section.
2. **(15 minutes) Cover letter:** Draft the letter to the real legislator or official with authority over the issue, enclosing the bill and memorandum and asking one specific thing: sponsor it, meet with us, or tell us why not. Advisor review before sending.

▲ **Week 6: Send, Log and Reflect (45 minutes)**

1. **(15 minutes) Send:** Email or mail to at least one official with authority (the student's own state legislator is the default; add the committee chair with jurisdiction where the topic is clear). Log the date and method.
2. **(15 minutes) Second channel:** Where the issue is local, also submit the recommendation as written public comment to the school board or council, or sign up for the public comment period. Log it.
3. **(15 minutes) Reflection (300 to 500 words):** What the current policy does, what I recommended and why, what response I received or expect, what I learned about how a recommendation reaches an official, and how this project changed my civic knowledge, skills and mindsets.
4. **After the conference:** Add the committee ranking, chamber result and any Governor's action to the file, and send a one-paragraph update to the official who was contacted.

▲ **Assessment: Policy Advocacy Rubric (100 points)**

- ▶ **Issue and Level of Government (10):** One-sentence issue; correct level; a number or fact in the statement.
- ▶ **Original Law Worksheet (20):** Correct citation; accurate plain-language summary; the gap identified with evidence.

- ▶ **Policy Evaluation and Prior Bills (15):** Evidence that the current policy falls short; at least one prior bill logged or the absence noted.
- ▶ **Solutions Research (15):** Two other jurisdictions with citations and results; justified choice.
- ▶ **The Bill (15):** Amends the real section with correct marks; every template section present; fiscal section sourced.
- ▶ **Memorandum and Cover Letter (10):** Argues from evidence; addresses the strongest con; asks the official for one specific thing.
- ▶ **Communication to Officials (10):** Sent to at least one official with authority; logged; second channel used where available.
- ▶ **Reflection (5):** Specific; honest about the response or the silence.

▲ Differentiation:

- ▶ **Support:** Give a list of five state issues with the governing section already identified. Allow the memorandum to be built from a fill-in frame. Let pairs split the research.
- ▶ **Challenge:** Require a meeting with the official or staff, a second bill on the same issue at a different level of government (local ordinance and state law), or a short op-ed submitted to a local paper as the second channel.

▲ Supporting Documents

1. Original Law Worksheet

Issue: _____ Level of government: School / Local / State / Federal

Citation of the governing law or policy (title, chapter, section):

Where I found it (URL or book): _____

What it requires, in plain language (three sentences): _____

When it was enacted or last amended, and by what bill, if findable:

What it does not cover (the gap): _____

Who enforces it: _____

Prior bills on this topic (number, year, sponsor, outcome): _____

2. Memorandum of Support Template

Memorandum in Support of [Bill title and number]

Submitted by: [Student name(s), delegation, school, date]

Purpose: One paragraph. What the bill does and why.

Summary of Provisions: Section by section, in plain language.

Statement in Support: The problem (with evidence and citations). The current law and its gap. Why this approach, including the two jurisdictions studied.

Arguments Against and Responses: The strongest objections, stated fairly, each with a response.

Known Positions of Other Organizations: Who supports, who opposes, with sources.

Fiscal Implications: Estimated cost or savings, who pays, with a source.

Environmental Implications: If any.

Effective Date: And why.

3. Cover Letter to an Official

Dear [Title and name],

I am a [grade] student at [school] and a delegate in YMCA Youth and Government. Over the past [number] weeks I have researched [issue] in [district or state]. I found that [one sentence on the gap in current law, with the citation]. Enclosed is a bill I have drafted to amend [section] and a memorandum of support explaining the evidence and the approaches taken in [two jurisdictions].

I am writing to ask whether you would [sponsor this change / meet with me for 15 minutes to discuss it / share why this approach would not work]. I will present this bill at the Youth and Government state conference on [date] and would welcome your guidance before then.

Thank you for your time. [Name, school, delegation, advisor's name and contact, student contact as the school allows]

4. Rhode Island and Connecticut Notes

For Rhode Island's student-led civics project (if the district accepts it), this unit documents: student choice of issue (Week 1), reasoning from evidence (Weeks 2 and 3), and the connection between state and local policy (the level of government sort and the second channel). For Connecticut's seal portfolio, file the bill, memorandum, cover letter, the response and the reflection together as one portfolio entry.