



OLR RESEARCH REPORT

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LEGISLATIVE MAILINGS

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You asked us to identify the laws and rules governing legislative mailing privileges. You also want to know the annual cost of district-wide mailings and legislators' replies to direct inquiries. This report updates OLR Report [95-R-1298](#).

SUMMARY

By law, the Joint Committee on Legislative Management supervises and funds the mail that the General Assembly sends (CGS § 2-15a). Legislative Management has promulgated rules that legislators must follow to exercise their mailing privileges. These rules allow members to reply to direct inquiries without limits on the number of pieces they send. Members may also send unsolicited communications, including an annual mailing to each household in their district, and send out surveys soliciting information on constituents' views. The rules limit unsolicited mailings to (1) a certain number of pieces of first-class mail per week and (2) an overage allowance at either a first-class or bulk rate, depending on the number of pieces. The numbers differ for Senate and House members due to the difference in the size of their districts.

The Legislative Management Committee staff keeps records of mailing costs for the General Assembly, legislative commissions, nonpartisan offices, and staff. The costs are not aggregated by legislator, nor do they distinguish between direct replies to constituents or unsolicited communications. It is therefore impossible to separate out the true cost

of (1) mailings by legislators only and (2) their direct replies versus unsolicited communications. But according to Legislative Management staff, legislators generate the vast majority of the bulk mail. And the bulk mail accounts for most of the costs associated with legislative mailings.

Legislative Management calculates mailing costs for each fiscal year. The figures differ significantly over the two years of a biennium because General Assembly members tend to send out their district-wide mailing for odd-numbered years at the end of the calendar year and for even-numbered years by July 15, the deadline in an election year. Both dates fall in a single fiscal year. The total cost for legislative mailings for FY 05-06 was \$1,575,511, for example, about 55% higher than the prior year.

DISTRICT-WIDE MAILING

Under CGS § 2-15a, members of the General Assembly may send one mailing per year to each household in their district “for informational purposes.” In an election year, they must send the mailing on or before July 15. (They may also deliver their letters to Legislative Management by this deadline to be considered compliant with the law.) The campaign finance law additionally prohibits incumbents from using public funds to mail promotional materials intended to support their reelection or election to another office during the three months preceding the election (CGS § 9-3331(d)).

RULES ON MAILING PRIVILEGES

Legislators can use the state mail service to carry out the duties and responsibilities of their office. Specifically, they can:

1. reply to direct inquiries from constituents or anyone living outside their district;
2. send unsolicited communications to their constituents, including the district-wide mailing;
3. send surveys or polls to constituents in their districts;
4. communicate with legislators from other states or members of Congress and with federal, state, and local governmental agencies; and

5. send intrastate and interstate communications, and communications within their district, to gather information on state or federal legislation.

Some of the rules do not apply to the president pro tempore of the senate, speaker of the house, or the majority or minority leader of each house. The leaders, for example, are not limited to a specified number of mailings per week.

Rules governing the district-wide mailing specify that be a one-page, two-color newsletter, no larger than 17 by 11 inches (187 square inches). It must be sent using the most economic bulk postage rate available, which averages about 20 cents each piece according to Legislative Management.

Members may send unsolicited mailings in addition to the district-wide mailing. Senators may send up to 1,000 first-class items a week; representatives up to 500. In addition, members may use an overage account during the course of a year. A senator can send excess pieces totaling up to 9,728 first-class items or 12,500 bulk rate items. A representative can send up to 2,432 by first-class or 3,125 at bulk rate. At the beginning of the calendar year, a member must choose to use his overage allowance at the first-class or the bulk rate. Table 1 shows the maximum allowances for unsolicited mailings, other than the district-wide mailing.

Table 1: Maximum Unsolicited Mailings

<i>Type of Mailing</i>	<i>Annual Limit for Senators</i>	<i>Annual Limit for Representatives</i>
First-class	52,000	26,000
Excess first-class or Excess bulk rate	9,728 12,500	2,432 3,125

The rules specify that, with the exception of constituents in their district, members (other than the leaders) cannot use their mailing privileges to survey or poll individuals. The rules similarly prohibit them from sending campaign letters, state promotional materials, or letters of congratulations or sympathy. But they are allowed to send unsolicited letters to new voters.

NUMBER AND COST OF LEGISLATIVE MAILINGS

Administrative regulations for the Joint Committee on Legislative Management require it to keep and maintain specific records concerning the number of pieces mailed by each member of the General Assembly (2006 Legislative Guide, pg. 197). For fiscal years 2001-2006, Legislative Management provided us with the (1) number of district-wide mailings legislators sent and (2) costs associated with legislative mailings for the General Assembly, legislative commissions, nonpartisan offices, and staff. The staff does not currently maintain costs for mailings by legislators only. According to Legislative Management, however, legislators send the vast majority of bulk mailings and bulk mailings are responsible for the majority of the total annual cost of legislative mailings.

For FY 04-05, the total cost of legislative mailings was \$875,155. In FY 05-06, the cost was much higher (\$1,575,511) because it included both of the members' district-wide mailings. They send out the odd-numbered year mailing at the end of the odd-numbered year and the even-numbered year mailing before the July 15 deadline of the even-numbered year. Tables 1 and 2 show the number of district-wide mailings and the total cost associated with legislative mailings, respectively.

Table 1: District-Wide Mailings by Senate and House

<i>FY</i>	<i>Senate</i>	<i>House</i>
2001	646,875	799,908
2002	1,491,498	1,314,547
2003	877,990	859,629
2004	1,638,202	1,775,122
2005	662,073	592,311
2006	1,871,118	1,590,198

Table 2: Legislative Mailing Costs

<i>FY</i>	<i>Metered Mail</i>	<i>Bulk Mail</i>	<i>Total</i>
2001*	\$148,916	\$685,383	\$834,299
2002	151,521	1,343,247	1,494,768
2003*	92,023	769,212	861,234
2004	177,999	1,335,877	1,513,870
2005	81,279	793,877	875,155
2006*	111,852	1,463,659	1,575,511

*Postage rate increases

Members send direct response to constituents via metered mail. Since Legislative Management staff keeps track of all mailing costs for the General Assembly, legislative commissions, nonpartisan offices, and staff, it is impossible to break out members' mailing costs for direct responses to constituents' inquiries from mailing costs for the other legislative offices.

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