

## Enable Citizens to Track Bills from Home

Through the Internet, citizens have greater access to legislative documents than ever before. Daily calendars, journals, bills, and committee hearing schedules — as well as legislative reports and information about Vermont’s fiscal practices and policies — are easy to find online. But there’s more that would be useful to citizens who want to follow issues in the State House. The Legislature’s Five-Year Information Technology Plan identifies improvements to the computer system that would make it possible to post more information electronically.

One big step would be providing public access to bills as they move through House and Senate committees. Currently, Internet users can look up bills online, but they don’t get a complete picture. They can see bills as they were introduced, the versions passed by the House or Senate, and the final version approved by both chambers and signed into law by the governor. But many bills, especially major ones, go through numerous iterations between introduction and final passage, and the amendments are difficult to track through the daily calendars and journals. People with the time and inclination to sit through committee hearings have access to all of the printed versions of bills and proposed amendments as the committees consider them. They can watch as proposals are made, accepted, or rejected.

Providing greater online access to documents now available to lobbyists and others inside the State House would go a long way toward enhancing public understanding and participation.

### ***Recommendation:***

Allow citizens to keep track of bill revisions as committees work on legislation by posting documents distributed in committee on the Legislature’s website at the end of each day.