



*Easy Read Edition*

# **They Work For Us:** **A Self-Advocate's Guide to** **Getting Through to your** **Elected Officials**

## **Part 2: Who Has the Power to** **Make Laws?**

## 2. Who has the power to make laws?

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There are two main types of **laws** that affect us:

1. Federal laws

2. State laws



**Federal laws** are laws for the whole United States.



For example, it is a federal law that all kids get to go to school.



**State laws** are laws only for people who live or work in a specific state.



For example, in California, students with disabilities can stay in school until they are 22.



In Montana, students with disabilities can only stay in school until they are 19.



The law in Montana doesn't change how long students with disabilities in California can stay in school.

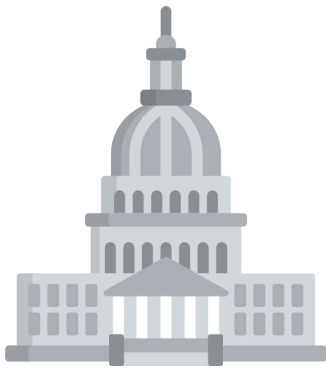
# Federal government



The **federal government** is in charge of the whole country.



The federal government makes federal laws.



The part of the federal government that makes laws is called **Congress**.



The people who have the power to make federal laws are **members of Congress**. We **elect** our members of Congress.



There are two different parts of Congress.  
These two parts are called:

1. The **Senate**

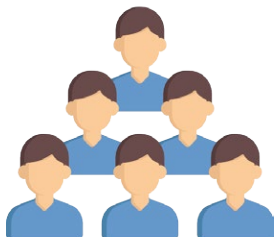


2. The **House of Representatives.**

## U.S. Senate



The elected officials in the Senate are called **Senators.**

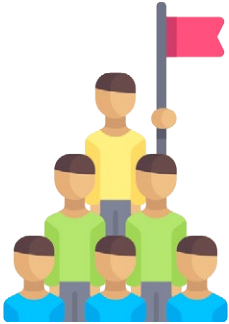


There are 100 Senators in the U.S. Senate.  
There are two Senators for each state.

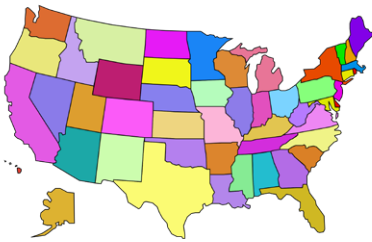
# U.S. House of Representatives



The elected officials in the House of Representatives are called **Representatives**.



There are 435 Representatives.



Every state has a different number of Representatives, based on how many people live in the state.



For example, there are about 39 million people who live in California. That's a lot of people, so California has 53 Representatives.



There are only about 1 million people who live in Montana. That's not a lot of people, so Montana only has 1 Representative.



Every state gets at least 1 Representative.



Each Representative comes from a different **district**. A district is a part of a state.



Most districts are made up of one town or a few towns that are next to each other.

## State governments



**State governments** are a lot like the federal government. They are smaller than the federal government because they are only for one state, not the whole country.



When a state makes a law, it is only a law for people in that state, not the whole country.



Most states have a **State Legislature**. The State Legislature is the part of the state government that makes laws.



Most State Legislatures have two parts, like the U.S. Congress does.



Most states have State Senators and State Representatives to make state laws. We elect our State Senators and State Representatives.



## Local governments



A **local government** is in charge of a smaller part of a state, like a city or a county.



Local governments can be very different depending on how many people live in a place or how big the place is.



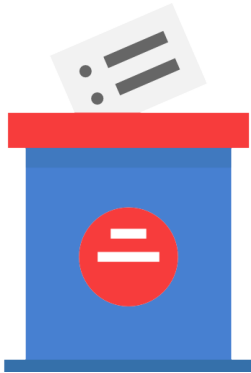
There are a lot of different cities and counties in the U.S, which means there are a lot of local governments in the U.S. They are all very different.



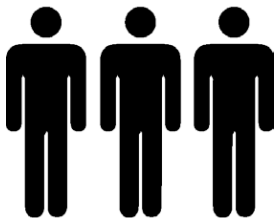
Local governments make **local laws**.



When a local government makes a law, it is only a law for people in that small area, not people in the whole state or the whole country.



Usually, we elect the people who make local laws.



The part of your local government that makes local laws might be called a City Council, a County Board, Aldermen, Selectmen, or something else.



Since local governments are so different from each other, it is hard for us to tell you a lot about your specific local government. But, since your local government is right where you live, you can learn about it on your own.



If you want to learn more about your local government, you can go to your local government building and ask for information. The building might be called a City Hall or a Town Hall.

# Federal laws, state laws, and local laws



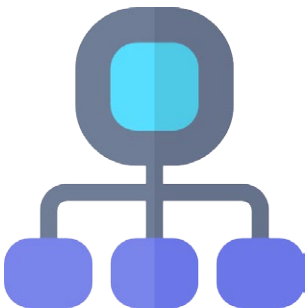
Federal laws are laws for the whole United States.



State laws are laws just for people in a certain state.



Local laws are laws just for people in a certain local area.



People have to follow their local laws, state laws, and federal laws all at the same time. So those laws have to work together.



For example, Sally is in Normaltown, California, in the United States. Sally has to follow the local laws in Normaltown, the state laws in California, *and* the federal laws for the whole United States.



States can't make laws that go against federal laws.



For example, all kids get to go to school. This is a federal law.



A state *can* make a law saying that students with disabilities can go to school until they are 19, until they are 22, or some other age.



A state *can't* make a law saying that kids don't get to go to school. That would go against the federal law.



Local governments can't make laws that go against federal laws *or* the laws in their state.



For example, all kids get to go to school. This is a federal law.



In California, students with disabilities can stay in school until they are 22. This is a state law.



Normaltown, CA *can't* make a law saying that kids don't get to go to school. That would go against the federal law.

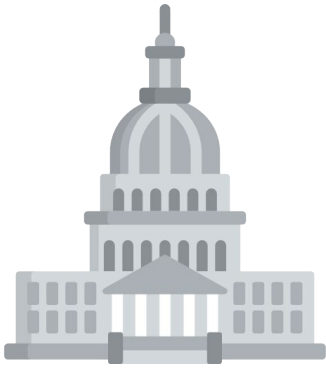


Normaltown, CA *can't* make a law saying that students with disabilities have to stop going to school when they are 20. That doesn't go against the federal law, but it still goes against the state law.



Normaltown, CA *can* make a law saying that students with disabilities can go to school until they are 25. That doesn't go against the state law or the federal law.

# Glossary



## Congress

The part of the federal government that makes laws.



## district

States are split up into different districts. Each Representative in the House of Representatives comes from a different district.



## elect

When we “elect” somebody, we vote for that person to become a part of the government.





## **federal government**

The government that is in charge of the entire country and is based in Washington, D.C. The federal government makes federal laws.



## **federal laws**

Federal laws are laws for the whole United States.



## **House of Representatives**

The House of Representatives is one of the two parts of Congress. There are 435 Representatives in the House of Representatives. Every state has a different number of Representatives, based on how many people live in the state.



## local government

A local government is in charge of a smaller part of a state, like a city or a county.



## local laws

Local governments make local laws. Local laws are just for people in that small area, not people in the whole state or the whole country.



## members of Congress

Members of Congress are the people who have the power to make federal laws. We elect our members of Congress.



## Representatives

Representatives are the elected officials in the House of Representatives.



## Senate

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State laws are laws only for people who live or work in a specific state.



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