

Introduction

Every year, state legislatures consider over 100,000 pieces of legislation, enact tens of thousands of bills into state law, and spend trillions of dollars on the essential infrastructure and services that we all rely upon. State legislators are uniquely positioned to improve the lives of millions of people for generations to come. Given the stubborn state of congressional gridlock, state legislatures have increasingly taken center stage in American politics, and yet, [20% of people](#) don't know who their state legislators are, and most people are unsure whether their state lawmakers are full or part time.

State lawmakers have one of the most important jobs in our society, but they are far from being representative of their state by almost every measure – race, gender identity and expression, class, age, sexual orientation, immigration status, occupation, and educational attainment. Some legislators are even using their power to silence the voices of their constituents by taking away our votes, denying us our rights, and trying to rig the system to hold on to power.

For too long, many state legislatures have also been dangerously underresourced, leaving some of our most important policymaking institutions vulnerable to greedy and power-hungry interests. The average state legislator receives an annual salary of less than \$34,000 and has access to just four staff during the legislative session. In these conditions, a cabal of wealthy elites, led by corporate interests, have succeeded in distorting our democracy by manipulating state legislatures to pad their bottom lines and consolidate power. And during the 2020 presidential election, these forces have shown how they would stop at nothing – even the destruction of our very democracy – to enrich themselves at the expense of the American people.

State legislatures belong to the people, and it's time for us to come together to shift power away from corporations and far-right extremists. Legislators should be reflective of all people, but representation is not enough; collectively, we must wield power and influence through the processes, organization, and power structures of the state legislatures that shape our lives.

To this end, we offer the SiX Principles for Transforming State Legislatures, a values-based framework for transforming state legislatures into more democratic institutions where we all have a say in the decisions that affect our families and communities. We share examples of how state legislators have created and enacted the policies that can bring us into this future.

Democracy is in peril, and our state legislatures are both the front line for continued attacks on our basic freedoms and rights, and the vanguard for a new future where the idea of participatory democracy is a reality. It's time to stand in solidarity to build a future where all of us can share power – starting with every state legislature in the country.