



Writing Legislation for a Tournament: Template and Checklist.

For students who want to submit a bill or resolution. Learn the parts, see a clean template, and avoid the mistakes that get legislation rejected or debated poorly.

Bill, resolution or amendment?

Many tournaments accept three kinds of legislation. Check the invitation for which types they take and for word or page limits.

TYPE	WHAT IT DOES	FORMAT CUE
Bill	Creates or changes a law, usually with a clear action and a way to carry it out	"BE IT ENACTED ..."
Resolution	Urges action that lies outside Congress's lawmaking power, rather than writing a law	"RESOLVED ..."
Constitutional amendment	Proposes a change to the Constitution	Check your tournament's format rules

Most leagues require legislation to be **national in scope**, meaning a U.S. federal issue, not a single school, town or state matter. Bills should fall within Congress's lawmaking jurisdiction, while resolutions urge action outside it. Always check your league for specifics.

Anatomy of a bill

- ♦ **Title:** a short "A Bill to ..." line that tells the reader the goal
- ♦ **Author and school:** the name and school (format varies by tournament)
- ♦ **Enacting clause (common convention; follow your tournament's template):** the formal opening, "BE IT ENACTED BY THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA ..."
- ♦ **Sections:** numbered parts. Section 1 is the main action; later sections cover who runs it, funding and the effective date
- ♦ **Enforcement and funding:** who pays, who is in charge, and how success is measured

Template

A BILL TO [GOAL IN PLAIN WORDS]

BE IT ENACTED BY THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

Section 1. The Department of [relevant federal agency] shall [specific action] for [specific group] beginning [date or time from passage].

Section 2. Funding for this program shall come from [existing source or new line item].

Section 3. The [agency or office] shall report results to Congress every [time period].

Section 4. This act takes effect [time] after passage.

Keep it short

One clear idea per bill. If your legislation needs a long list of exceptions, it is probably too big to debate in a few three-minute speeches.

What makes legislation debatable

Good legislation has a real **clash**: reasonable people can disagree and both sides can find evidence. Avoid ideas that everyone supports or that no one can defend.

TOO ONE-SIDED	BETTER, MORE DEBATABLE
Ban a clearly harmful practice nobody defends	Fund a program with a real cost trade-off
Mandate something already law	Change how an existing program is run or funded
Vague ("improve schools")	Specific ("expand a named federal grant")

Before you submit

- ☐ Check the deadline and submission method on the tournament page
- ☐ Confirm word or page limits and formatting rules
- ☐ Make sure the topic is national and school-appropriate
- ☐ Write exact, specific actions (who, what, when, how much)
- ☐ Draft a one-paragraph summary for your authorship speech
- ☐ Collect at least two pieces of evidence on each side before submitting

Common mistakes: vague verbs ("help", "support"), no funding, no named agency, blending two topics in one bill, and legislation that duplicates what was already debated at the tournament.

Want help?

Want a plan built around your debater? Book a free consultation with Scholar Coach at the link below.

Built from public guidance: Wikipedia: Congressional Debate · NSDA Nationals Congressional Debate scorer instructions. Rules change by league and tournament, so always confirm against your tournament invitation and current league rules.

NOTES

Want a plan built around **your** debater?

Book a free consultation. The short intake takes about a minute and opens right away.

BOOK NOW →