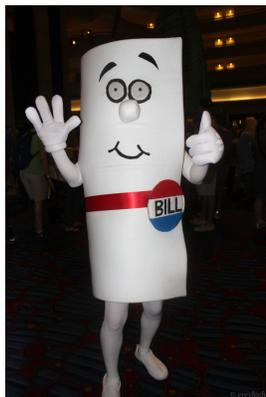


Marker Bills 101



What is a marker bill? A bill introduced in Congress to signal policy ideas and gather support for those ideas, most often with a goal of inclusion in an omnibus bill like the farm bill.

Why do we need them? Marker bills help lawmakers and grassroots advocates alike build support for policy asks. With a large omnibus bill like the farm bill, having smaller packages like marker bills helps ideas get attention - and the more support we get for the marker bills we like, the more likely they'll be pulled into the final omnibus bill. **These bills do not generally become law as standalone bills, unlike what you may remember from Schoolhouse Rock.**

What are some examples of legislation for which we use marker bills?

- The Farm Bill
- Appropriations
- Pandemic Aid Packages (thanks, COVID)
- Child Nutrition Act Reauthorization (see example image used for 2019 CNR advocacy efforts)



Who drafts marker bills? One of three scenarios usually play out with marker bills NSAC cares about:

- We have a policy idea, we bring it to the offices of Members of Congress (MoCs) who have shown interest in taking leadership on that issue and work together to develop the bill language
- A MoC has an idea and asks for our help in crafting the marker bill
- Another ally organization develops a marker bill with one of their Congressional champions

Once drafted, marker bills are officially introduced by Members of Congress. The person who introduces a bill is called the “original sponsor.”

How do other lawmakers show support for marker bills? Once a bill has been introduced, other lawmakers in that chamber can show support by becoming a “cosponsor” of the bill. The more cosponsors a bill has, especially if there are both Democrat and Republican cosponsors, the easier it is for its original sponsor to make the case for including its ideas in the relevant omnibus legislation.

What do NSAC members do with marker bills? NSAC members play several critical roles in the development and promotion of marker bills. You can...

1. Shape the policy language in marker bills
 - a. Bring ideas from the field into policy conversations
 - b. Join NSAC issue committees
 - c. Participate in the NSAC policy priority setting process
2. Build support for marker bills by asking your Members of Congress to cosponsor them
 - a. Send an email to your MoC's office asking for their support
 - b. Set up a meeting to speak with your MoC or their agriculture staffer to request that they become a cosponsor
 - c. Show up at an in-district event like a town hall and ask your MoC to cosponsor the marker bill
3. Organize in your communities to elevate the issues in marker bills and strengthen their political appeal
 - a. Send an email action alert to engage your base in calling their MoCs to make a marker bill co-sponsorship ask
 - b. Highlight stories about farmers who would benefit from policy in the marker bill on your blog, social media, or in the press
 - c. Hold an on-farm in-district event to highlight how the marker bill would benefit farmers in the district

Marker bills: A typical action timeline

Phase 0 - Bill development

NSAC staff and our partners work to develop marker bill language. Bill development can include Members of Congress from the get-go or NSAC and partners seek Members of Congress to introduce the bill once the language is mostly put together. **NSAC members** may be called on to help find original co-sponsors, sharing with your state's Members of Congress how the marker bill relates to the experiences of those in your state.

Phase 1 - Bill Introduction

NSAC and partners find Members of Congress to formally introduce the bill. Ideally, we have initial sponsors from both sides of the aisle.

Phase 2 - Bill Support Push

Once a marker bill has been introduced, it is time to push for broad support of the bill. The most effective way for a Member of Congress to show support is to add their name

as an additional co-sponsor. NSAC activates **NSAC members** to directly ask their MoCs to co-sponsor as well as to mobilize their base in their respective states to ask their MoCs to co-sponsor. This is done through phone calls, meetings, emails, postcard campaigns, and more.

A simple example of a cosponsorship ask via phone or meeting:

“Hi there, my name is [name] with [organization], located in [city and state]. Have you heard of [marker bill name]? It has been introduced by [initial sponsor’s name] and it’s great because [X, Y, Z reasons]. It would be really valuable to [insert state] if you could co-sponsor [marker bill name]. Can you do it?”

Phase 3 - Bill Inclusion in Omnibus Package

When the time comes for the relevant committees (in the case of the farm bill, the Agriculture Committees) to sit down and put the omnibus package language together, these MoCs discuss the various marker bills that have been introduced leading up to this point and select marker bills to include in the final omnibus package. **NSAC members** with MoCs on the committees play an important role in doing a final push for our desired marker bills to get into the final package.

How will NSAC support members in marker bill advocacy work?

In addition to helping craft marker bill language, NSAC will provide members with advocacy insight and materials, including:

- Updates on bill introduction timing and cosponsor strategy
- Blog posts, press releases, and 1-pagers with details on the marker bills
- Sample messaging for cosponsor outreach and grassroots mobilization via email, phone, and social media