



HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

A bill must go through many steps before it can become law. Each of these steps represents an opportunity for you to get involved, to let your legislators know your views, and to impact the final content and outcome of the bill.



INTRODUCTION

A legislator has an idea or responds to a request from constituents.

A bill is drafted and introduced in the chamber in which the legislator serves (either the Senate or House of Representatives/ Assembly). This process is sometimes called “filing” or “dropping” a bill.

The same bill with a different bill number may be filed by a legislator in the other chamber. This is called a “companion bill.”

COMMITTEE APPROVALS

A bill must first be considered (or “heard”) and approved by a policy committee such as Agriculture, Judiciary, and so on. This is called a “hearing.” It is common for bills to be amended (changed) at this time. Bills can be assigned to more than one committee.

If the bill will cost money to implement, many legislatures will require that it also be considered by a fiscal committee such as Appropriations or Finance.

A bill that is not considered and approved by its assigned committee(s) does not advance.

Most legislatures require a bill to go through a Rules Committee before advancing to the House or Senate floor for a vote. This is usually a formality to check for technical issues, but bills have been stalled here.

VOTE OF FULL CHAMBER

The chamber in which the bill was introduced votes on the bill. Many states allow the bill to be amended at this stage as well.

LET’S DO THIS AGAIN!

The US Congress and all but one state legislature (Nebraska) have two legislative chambers, so the bill typically goes through the same process in the second chamber. For example, if it was introduced and approved in the House/ Assembly, it will advance to the Senate, to Senate committees, and then to the full Senate for a vote.

FINAL LEGISLATIVE APPROVAL/CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

If the second chamber amends (changes) the bill, it goes back to the first chamber again for approval.

If the two chambers don’t agree on the amendments, the bill may be sent to a Conference Committee to seek a compromise prior to a final vote by both chambers.

EXECUTIVE APPROVAL

The President/ Governor may veto (reject) the bill or sign it into law.

This is a summary of typical legislative procedures, which will vary depending on your state and the specific circumstances. Contact the US Capitol or your state legislature to learn more about every step in its legislative process. City, county, and metropolitan governments utilize different procedures, and local lawmaking processes may be significantly different from place to place. Contact local officials for details.