

HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

1. A bill may be introduced in either the Senate or House of Representatives, but the procedure by which a bill becomes a law is much the same, wherever the bill originates.

In this story, the bill is introduced in the Senate by a member, or members, of that body. After the bill is filed with the Secretary of the Senate, it is given a number and, unless a majority demands it be read in full, it is read the first time by title only in open session of the Senate. It is then referred to a standing committee of the Senate.

2. The committee studies the bill and often holds public hearings on it. The committee will then meet to consider the information it has gathered. It may approve the bill with or without amendments, draft a new bill on the same subject incorporating the desired changes, or take no action.

3. The committee is now ready to report back to the Senate. If the majority is in favor of the bill as introduced or with certain amendments, the committee recommends the bill for passage. The committee report is read in open session of the Senate, and the bill is then referred to the Rules Committee.

6. After passing in the Senate, the bill will go through an almost identical procedure in the House.

If the bill is passed by the House, but is amended by that body, the Senate must concur in the amendments or ask the House to remove them. If the Senate does not accept the change in the bill and the House insists on the change, a conference committee may be requested to work out the differences.

5. When the bill appears on the calendar for second reading, it is subject to amendment. It is then returned to the Rules Committee where it must receive a favorable vote before being placed on the third reading calendar for final passage. This referral to Rules is often bypassed by vote of the Senate and the bill is placed on final passage immediately following its second reading. Depending upon the degree of controversy, debate may last a few minutes to several hours — or even several days.

4. After the bill has been recommended for passage by the standing committee to which it was originally referred, the Rules Committee can either place it on the second reading calendar for debate before the entire body, or take no action. If the bill has a significant fiscal impact, it may be referred to the Ways & Means or Transportation Committee for budget impact

7. If appointed, a conference committee has the power to work from the proposed amendments or to recommend new amendments or a new bill, consistent with the subject matter of the original measure. When the conferees reach agreement, they report to their respective houses. Their report is either adopted or rejected without any changes.

8. If the report is adopted and the bill passed by both houses, the bill is signed by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House in open sessions of each body, and then is sent for the Governor's signature.

9. Within five days, if the Legislature is still in session, or twenty days after its adjournment, the Governor may sign the bill or veto all or any section of it. The Legislature can override the veto by a two-thirds vote of both houses. If the Governor fails to act on the bill, it becomes law without a signature.

