

How an Idea Becomes Law



A bill is simply an idea that someone would like to see become law. It could be anything from the penalty for committing a crime to the amount of money that can be spent on a state program.

The idea can come from anyone, but only a State Representative or Senator can take that idea and guide it to final passage through the State Legislature.



Drafting a bill means putting the idea into legal language. The drafting is done by the Legislative Research Council, an agency of state government.

Introduction of a bill can be made by any member of the House or Senate, and more than one legislator generally sponsors a bill. The legislator whose name appears first on the bill is the "prime sponsor."



The BILL is introduced in the House or Senate

A bill is given to the Chief Clerk of the House or the Secretary of the Senate and is assigned a number. If the bill is sponsored by a Senator, it is a Senate Bill. Proposals which start in the House are House Bills.

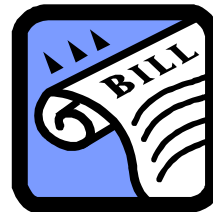
The bill is given a First Reading in the "House of Origin" (in the House if sponsored by a Representative; in the Senate, if sponsored by a Senator). A First Reading means the bill's number and title are read aloud.

The Senate President or Speaker of the House then assigns the bill to a committee.



Committee action is crucial to the legislative process. A committee's responsibility is to examine a bill carefully, take testimony for and

against the bill, and decide whether to send the bill to the "floor" (the full House or Senate) for consideration by the full body.



The committee can send the bill to the floor with a "Do Pass" recommendation. They can "Table" the bill, which means it is dead unless the full body orders the committee to send the bill to the floor. Or the committee can "Defer to the 36th or 41st Legislative Day" which also kills the bill, since there are only 35 or 40 legislative days in an annual session. In rare cases, if a committee cannot get enough votes to pass or kill the bill, a measure may be sent to the floor without recommendation. In that case, the full body must vote whether they want to place the bill on the "calendar" (agenda) for consideration.



Once a bill reaches the floor, it is debated and voted on. If it passes, the bill is forwarded on to the other body, where it goes through the same committee process.



If a bill passes both the House and Senate, it is sent to the Governor. If he signs it, the bill becomes law. If he vetoes it, the Legislature has an opportunity to decide whether to override or uphold his veto. If the Legislature votes to override the veto, the bill becomes law.