



The Legislative Process

- Legislation may begin in either the House of Representatives or the Senate, except for tax-related measures, which must begin in the House. After a “sponsor” introduces a bill, it is given a number and referred to the appropriate committee for hearings and amendments.
- The committee to which the bill is referred may in turn refer the bill to the appropriate subcommittee. The subcommittee then holds hearings during which the subcommittee hears testimony from the executive branch, other public officials, and leading experts. After the hearing, the subcommittee members may hold a “markup” session during which they amend the legislation. If a majority of subcommittee members are in favor of the bill, they “report” the bill favorably to the larger committee.
- Once the committee receives the bill, the members may hold more hearings and offer more amendments to the proposed legislation. If it is approved by a majority of committee members, the bill is reported out.
- Next, the leadership places the bill on the legislative calendar and brings it to the floor for action. In the House, important bills are often coupled with a special rule that determines how the floor debate will be organized. House members can debate the bill and offer and vote on amendments. After the allotted debate time has expired, the bill moves to a final vote. A simple majority is required to pass the bill.
- In the Senate, unless a special rule is adopted, a 3/5ths majority is needed to end debate and bring the bill to a final vote. For final passage of the bill a simple majority is needed.
- Once the bill passes one chamber, it must also be passed in the other. Related bills are often introduced simultaneously in both chambers to speed along the process. If the two chambers pass slightly different bills, they can amend one bill to conform to the other and bring it to the floor again for final passage.
- If the two chambers pass bills with major differences, however, both chambers put together a conference committee, made up of members from both the House and the Senate, which reconciles differences and agrees to a conference report that irons out the disagreements. The conference report and the newly agreed upon bill are then brought to the floor of each chamber and passed.
- Once identical versions of the bill have been passed by each chamber, the bill is brought to the President to sign into law. If the President signs the bill, it becomes law. If the President does not act on the bill within ten days, it automatically becomes law if Congress is in session. If the President vetoes the bill, it will only become law if 2/3rds of the members in each chamber vote to override the veto.

- Note: Along the way, certain steps in the legislative process may be skipped. An introduced bill might not be referred to a committee, and may instead be brought to the floor for immediate action. Similarly, a bill could only pass through a committee and might not be referred to a subcommittee. The only *requirement* for a bill to become a law is for identical versions to be passed by both chambers and for the bill to be either signed by the President or for the President's veto to be overridden.