

Advocacy

The Legislative Process



Legislative Process

Laws are made through a structured process

The process begins when a Member of Congress decides that a law is needed on a certain issue.

The Member of Congress has his/her ideas written into a document called a bill.

Sponsors & Co-sponsors

The Member who originates the bill is called the bill's sponsor.

The bill's sponsor may seek support for the bill from other Members of Congress.

If other representatives decide to support a House bill or if other senators decide to support a Senate bill, they may choose to co-sponsor it.

This means that they sign onto the bill and make their support public.

Co-sponsors can choose to support a bill for many reasons.

Sometimes another Member of Congress has asked them to sign on.

Other times, their constituents have requested that they support the bill.

Members of Congress can also decide to support a bill based on their own agendas.

The more co-sponsors a bill has, the more likely it is to be successful.

Introduction to Congress

The bill's sponsor submits the bill to the chamber of Congress of which he/she is a Member.

The bill is given a number.

House bills are numbered with the prefix 'H.R.'

Senate bills are numbered with the prefix 'S.'

Committees and Subcommittees

The leadership in the House or Senate may then direct the bill to the committee or committees which discuss the issues that the bill addresses.

The committee may consider the bill or send it to subcommittee for discussion first.

Members of the committee or subcommittee may choose to hold a hearing on a bill.

During the hearing, experts submit testimony in favor of or in opposition of the bill.

Members may also select to 'mark-up' the bill. This process involves discussion of potential changes to the bill.

Finally, the bill may be reported. Members of the committee submit a report to the Floor (or entirety) of the House or Senate with their recommendation for action.

If no action is taken in committee, the bill will not progress to a Floor vote and is considered 'dead in committee.'

On the Floor

The bill will be added to the calendar for further review.

If the leadership in the House or Senate allows the bill to come to the Floor for discussion, Members can:

- Debate about the bill
- Approve or reject proposed changes from committee
- Approve or reject new changes that come up during this time

Any changes to the bill are written separately and called amendments.

Amendments to a bill must be approved with the majority of Members voting in favor of successful amendments.

If no action is taken on the floor to consider the bill, the bill cannot come to a vote and will not succeed.

After amendments are considered, the bill may be considered for a vote. A majority of Members must vote in favor of the bill for it to succeed.

If the House or Senate approves the bill it is sent to the other chamber for similar consideration.

The bill will follow the same process from introduction through committee and to vote.

Members can continue to add amendments to the bill during this time.

If the bill is passed with additional amendments, it is sent to a group of representatives and senators to iron out the differences between the two versions of the bill.

This group is called a conference committee.

After the conference committee process, the bill can go to the President for consideration.

If the bill is passed without additional amendments, it is sent directly to the President for consideration.

The President reviews the bill.

If the President approves of the bill:

They might choose to sign it into law.

They may also choose not to sign it, and if Congress is in session, the bill will become law after 10 days.

If they disapprove of the bill:

They might choose to veto the bill. The bill will be sent back to either the House or the Senate, depending on where it originated. Congress will then have a chance to override the veto.

If there are less than 10 days left before Congress adjourns and the President chooses not to sign the bill, the bill will not become law. Congress will not be able to override this. This is called a 'pocket veto'.

If the President vetoes the bill, it is sent back to Congress for another vote.

If at least two-thirds of the Members of the originating chamber vote in favor of the bill, it is sent to the other chamber of Congress.

If less than two-thirds of those Members vote for the bill, it will not progress further.

In the next chamber, if two-thirds of the Members vote for the bill, the President's veto will be overridden and the bill will become law.

If the two-thirds vote is not achieved, the bill will die.

Key Points

A bill is introduced by a sponsor.

Other Members of congress may co-sponsor a bill.

Each bill must go through a lengthy process before Congress can vote on it.

Every bill must be approved by the President or 2/3 of both Houses of Congress to become law.