



HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

Connecticut Edition!

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- The Connecticut General Assembly consists of 151 members of the State House of Representatives and 36 State Senators.
 - The makeup of the House is 78 Democrats and 71 Republicans (two seats are vacant until April).
 - The makeup of the Senate is 18 Democrats and 18 Republicans. The Lieutenant Governor is the President of the Senate and can cast a tiebreaking vote on the floor of the full Chamber.
- Each Committee is a “joint” committee, meaning that unlike the U.S. Congress, each of the 27 Committees consists of State Representatives and State Senators.
 - There are 27 different committees in the CGA. They all have cognizance over different issues and in some cases, oversight over certain state departments, which are part of the Executive Branch.
 - This year, with the Senate tied, there is shared leadership in the Committees. There is a Democrat Senate Chair and Vice-Chair, Republican Senate Chair and Vice-Chair and House Democratic Chair and Vice-Chair. As the sole minority caucus, House Republicans have a “ranking member” on each Committee. Democrats hold a one-vote majority on most Committees.
- Our legislature is part time. The odd years are long sessions, which convene in January and end in June. The even years are short sessions, which convene in February and end in May.
- 1. The bill is introduced one of three ways:
 - a. The Governor can introduce it
 - b. A Committee can vote to raise it
 - c. *In long sessions only*, individual legislators can introduce it

The deadline to raise a bill is in the first few weeks of Session. In long sessions, the deadline for individual legislators to introduce concepts is only two weeks after Session begins.

- 2. Once a bill is introduced, it is referred to a Committee. The Committee can either vote to reserve it for a Public Hearing or it can do nothing.
 - a. Once the deadline to Reserve a Bill for Public Hearing has passed, a Bill that has not been reserved for a hearing is dead.**

3. The Committee holds public hearings. Often, these go late into the night.
4. If the Bill has been introduced by an individual legislator, the Committee can “Vote to Draft” the bill. Committee Bills and Governors Bills skip this step. The Committee can also vote to refer the bill to another Committee.
 - a. If the Vote to Draft deadline passes without that vote on a bill, that bill is dead.**
5. The Bill is then ‘screened,’ usually by the leadership of the Committee and staff. Often, bills before this point are just one-sentence concepts. The nonpartisan Legislative Commissioners Office (legislative attorneys) write the bill into a draft law. Bills are often screened multiple times and changes are made. This process is not public.
 - a. A Draft of the bill will be posted in advance of final Committee action.
6. At the end of the Committee process, generally at the end of March, the Committee will hold meetings to pass bills. In the CGA, this is called a “Joint Favorable Report,” or “JF.” The Committee can also send a favorable report of a bill to another Committee.
 - a. This year because each Committee has an equal number of Democratic and Republican Senators, a procedural step can be taken to split the Committee and vote separately as House and Senate Committees. This action on a Senate Bill followed by a tie vote of Senators, means that a motion to JF a bill fails, killing the bill.**
 - b. At the Committee meeting, it can be amended on the floor, or it can be introduced with “Substitute Language.” Often, this Substitute Language is the result of negotiations between legislators and leaders of the Committee. It is not public until after the vote is taken. If the bill is passed with substitute language, the motion is a “Joint Favorable Substitute,” or “JFS.”
 - c. The chairperson of the meeting can also, *at their discretion*, not call a bill on the agenda. This is called ‘holding’ the bill. If a bill is on the agenda and held, it is dead**
 - d. If the deadline passes without a bill being JFed, the bill is dead.**
7. Once a Committee has passed a bill, the nonpartisan Offices of Legislative Research and Fiscal Analysis study it. They write reports about what the bill will do and what it will cost. Once their analysis is complete, the bills are technically ready to be debated by the House and Senate and are placed on the Chamber’s ‘Calendar.’
 - a. If the Office of Fiscal Analysis says a bill will cost the state money, it will likely have to be referred to the Appropriations Committee. If that is the case, the likelihood of the bill becoming law is low.**
8. Now, negotiations occur. Legislative champions and committee leaders must negotiate with their caucus leadership, colleagues, and make sure the Governor will sign the bill. Compromises are made to prevent gridlock. These compromises often result in sweeping amendments called on the floor that become the bill.
 - a. These sweeping amendments are called “strike-all amendments,” and begin by saying, in common parlance, “Everything in the bill that passed committee is deleted and the following is inserted in its place.” They will often completely change the effect of a bill that passed Committee.
9. A House Bill begins in the House and moves to the Senate upon passage—vice versa with a Senate Bill.

- a. Each Chamber can choose to call a bill or not. It is unusual that a bill will be called that cannot pass, and inter- and intra-caucus negotiations, as well as leadership's priorities, play a role in determining what gets called.
 - b. Bills almost always pass each chamber in identical form, or "in accordance." While there is a process for a bill that passes one chamber having been amended from how it passed the other, it is very unusual and would generally mean the bill would die.**
10. If the Governor signs the bill, it is law!
- a. If the Governor does not sign the bill within a few weeks, it becomes law.
 - b. A two-thirds majority vote of the legislature is required to overturn a veto.
11. If Session ends "*Sine Die*" and a bill is left without having completed steps 1-9, then the process to pass the bill will have to begin again in the next year's legislative session. Unlike Congress, which runs on a two-year session schedule, Connecticut's process begins anew each year.

**Importantly: No concept is dead until *Sine Die*, or truly until after a State budget is passed. Even if a bill fails to pass Committee, especially if the concept has received a public hearing, it can be revived in several ways:

1. In an amendment to a bill that did pass the Committee. As long as it is germane to a bill that did pass a Committee, language can always be added in an amendment.
 - a. Amendments can be passed on any bill, but Committees often pass what are called 'vehicle' bills. The sole purpose of these bills is to move a 'vehicle' through the Committee process so that it is still alive and can be amended to include legislation that was not ready for passage by the Committee's deadline.
2. In the Implementer. The State passes a biennial budget every two years, and amends that budget in the out-years. The budget itself consists of appropriations (spending money) and revenue through taxes and fees (raising money). How money is spent is set in law, and so a bill implementing the budget is also passed.
 - a. This bill is often well over 500 pages long and includes all manner of legislation.
 - b. Much of the law included in the Implementer is legitimate. *Example:* The budget assumes \$40 million in savings from closing a prison. A section in the Implementer mandates that the prison will close.
 - c. Some of the Implementer, however, has very little to do with the budget. These are called 'rats,' and they are often the result of lobbying and negotiation with individual legislators in exchange for their affirmative vote on the budget itself.
3. In Special Session. The State Constitution mandates that the legislature adjourn *Sine Die* by midnight on a set day. But Special Session may be called. In order for legislation to be passed in Special Session, it must be specified in the call. Sometimes, the budget and/or the Implementer are passed during Special Session.