

The Path of Legislation



A bill is drafted by a member and staff with outside consultations.

The bill is introduced by the member and assigned a bill number.

The bill is then referred to the committee or committees with jurisdiction over the subject matter of the legislation.

The introducing member circulates a "Dear Colleague" letter asking for co-sponsors for the bill.

After a committee receives a bill, the committee will refer it to the proper subcommittee, since subcommittees have a more narrow focus than committees. The subcommittee chair schedules a hearing on the bill. The hearing is held and persons interested in testifying may request an opportunity to present oral and/or written testimony in support of or in opposition to the legislation.

The subcommittee "marks up" the bill and votes on it. If approved by the subcommittee, the bill goes to the full committee for consideration. The full committee can further amend the bill before final markup and vote. If approved by the full committee, the bill is reported to the full Senate or House for vote.

The House Rules Committee determines when the House will consider the legislation, how long the debate will last, and the number of amendments that will be considered. In the Senate, the majority leader schedules the legislation. Senate debate is open-ended—therefore allowing for the possibility of filibuster—and the number of amendments is unrestricted.

The President Vetoes the measure. The bill is returned to its chamber of origin.

OR

The President signs the bill, and then the bill becomes a law.

The president can either enact the legislation into law or veto the measure and return it to Congress. A vetoed measure requires a two-thirds majority vote by the House and Senate to override a veto. If overridden, the measure automatically becomes law.

If the bills are different, a conference committee is appointed to iron out the differences. After this is achieved, a conference report is generated and sent to both houses for approval. This is then forwarded to the president for a signature.

When and if identical bills are approved in both legislative bodies, the measure is "enrolled" and sent to the president to sign.

If the bill is first introduced in the House, then "companion legislation," a bill identical to or similar to the House bill, may be introduced in the Senate (or vice versa).