



The Path of Legislation

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When engaging in advocacy efforts, it is important to understand the path of legislation.

1. Bill is Drafted

A bill is drafted by a Member of Congress with input from staff and stakeholder consultation.



2. Bill is Introduced

The bill is then introduced in the House of Representatives or Senate by that Member and assigned a bill number.



3. Bill is Referred to Committee

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



4. “Dear Colleague” Letter is Circulated

The introducing Member circulates a “Dear Colleague” letter asking for co-sponsors for the bill.



5. Bill is Referred to Subcommittee

After a committee receives a bill, the committee will refer it to the proper subcommittee—since subcommittees have a more narrow focus than the whole committee. 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.



6. Subcommittee “Marks Up” the Bill



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.

7. Rules are set for Consideration of the Bill

If the bill is introduced in the House of Representatives, 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. If the bill is introduced in the Senate, the majority leader schedules the consideration of the bill. Senate debate is open-ended (therefore, allowing for the possibility of a filibuster) and the number of amendments is unrestricted.

8. The Bill is Debated and Voted Upon

In line with the set rules, the bill is put up for debate and vote before the full body (in either the House or the Senate).

9. The Bill Progresses to the Other Body of Congress

“Companion Legislation”—a bill that is identical or similar to the original bill—is introduced in the other body of Congress.

If the bills are identical and approved in both legislative bodies, the measure is “enrolled” and the legislation progresses forward.

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 bodies of Congress for approval.

10. The Bill is Forwarded to the President

The President can either sign the legislation—enacting it into law—or, the President can veto it and return it to Congress. If the President vetoes the bill, it is returned to its chamber of origin and will require a two-thirds majority vote by both the House and Senate to override the veto and become law.

11. The Bill Becomes Law