

## HOW A BILL BECOMES LAW IN PENNSYLVANIA

**Introduction:** Anyone may draft a bill; however, only members of the General Assembly can introduce legislation, and by doing so become the sponsor(s). There are three basic types of legislation in Pennsylvania: bills, house resolutions, and senate resolutions. The official legislative process begins when a bill or resolution is numbered - HB signifies a House bill and SB a Senate bill - referred to a committee and printed by the Legislative Reference Bureau.

**Step 1. Referral to Committee:** Bills are usually referred to standing committees in the House or Senate according to carefully delineated rules of procedure.

**Step 2. Committee Action:** When a bill reaches a committee it is placed on the committee's calendar. It is at this point that a bill is examined carefully and its chances for passage are determined. If the committee does not act on a bill, it is their equivalent of killing it.

**Step 3. Scheduling Floor Action:** After a bill is reported back to the chamber where it originated, it is placed in chronological order on the calendar. In the House there are several different legislative calendars, and the Speaker and Majority Leader largely determine if, when, and in what order bills come up. The Senate also has several legislative calendars.

**Step 4. Debate:** When a bill reaches the floor of the House or Senate, there are rules or procedures governing the debate. These rules determine the conditions and amount of time allocated for debate.

**Step 5. Voting:** After the debate and the approval of any amendments, the bill is passed or defeated by the members voting.

**Step 6. Referral to Other Chamber:** When a bill is passed by the

House or the Senate it is referred to the other chamber where it usually follows the same route through committee and floor action. This chamber may approve the bill as received, reject it, ignore it, or amend it.

**Step 7. Conference Committee Action:** If only minor changes are made to a bill by the other chamber, it is common for the legislation to go back to the first chamber for concurrence. However, when the actions of the other chamber significantly alter the bill, a conference committee is formed to reconcile the differences. If the conferees are unable to reach agreement, the legislation dies. If agreement is reached, a conference report is prepared describing the committee member's recommendations for changes. Both the House and the Senate must approve of the conference report. This mainly happens when legislative chambers are led by different parties.

**Step 8. Final Actions:** After a bill has been approved by the House and Senate in identical form, it is sent to the Governor. If the Governor approves of the legislation and signs it, the bill becomes law. Or, the Governor can take no action for ten days, and it automatically becomes law. If the Governor opposes the bill, she or he can veto it. The Governor can also hold the bill for a time without taking action, either signature or veto, for 10 days while the General Assembly is in session or 30 days after final adjournment, after which it will automatically become law.

**Step 9. Overriding a Veto:** If the Governor vetoes a bill, the General Assembly may attempt to "override the veto." This requires a two-thirds roll call vote of the members who are present in sufficient numbers for a quorum.