

# How a Bill Becomes a Law

The saying "it takes an act of Congress to get something done" is true. Getting a bill to become a law is a long process with many twists and turns.

The following steps outline the basic path of how a bill can become a law:

- **A bill is introduced and gets a number.** The process begins when a bill or resolution is numbered within the House or Senate (i.e.: H.R. 3939 or S. 1300).
- **The bill is referred to Committee.** Bills are referred to the appropriate committees in the House or Senate.
- **Committee Action.** After the committee receives the bill, it may be placed on the committee's calendar or it can be referred to a subcommittee for study and hearings before moving to full committee.
- **Mark-Up.** Once hearings in the subcommittee are completed, the bill is marked up to reflect any changes and voted on. If the bill passes, then it moves to the full committee for another mark-up and a vote.
- **Committee Reports.** Once a bill passes out of committee, the committee issues a report describing the purpose and scope of the bill. The next step is consideration by the entire chamber, either the House or Senate.
- **Floor Action.** To move to a floor vote, the bill must be placed on the chamber's calendar, which is controlled by the majority party and leadership. Currently, Republicans are the majority in the House of Representatives, and Democrats are the majority in the Senate. On the chamber floor, the bill is debated and amendments can be offered before a final vote.
- **Voting.** After debate ends and votes on amendments conclude, the full chamber (House or Senate) votes on the bill.
- **Round Two.** Even if the first chamber passes the bill, it must have a companion bill or counterpart in the other legislative body. The entire process begins again - committee consideration, mark-up, etc. If the bill is reported out of committee, it will then be considered before the full chamber.
- **Conference Committee.** If the second chamber passes the bill with significant changes, the bill must go to conference. A conference committee with both Senators and Representatives forms to resolve the differences between the two versions of the bill. After reconciling the two bills, the conference committee issues a report outlining its compromises. Both chambers then vote on the report.
- **Final Step.** If both the House and Senate pass the conference report, it's transmitted to the President. The President can approve the bill by signing it into law, after which the bill receives a Public Law number (i.e. PL 107-142). Or, the

President can veto the bill, after which it returns to Congress with a veto explanation. To override a veto, two-thirds of the House and Senate must vote to override the veto.