



Information on the Legislative Process in Ohio

The laws and rules that govern the operation of state government in Ohio are found in the Ohio Constitution, the Ohio Revised Code, and the Ohio Administrative Code. The Ohio Constitution provides for a bicameral General Assembly consisting of a 99 member House of Representatives and a 33 member Senate. Members of the House are elected for two years, and members of the Senate are elected for four years, with half of the Senate elected every two years. Senators and Representatives are subject to term limits of eight years.

The Ohio Constitution requires that the General Assembly meet in regular session starting the first Monday of January in odd-numbered years. The second part of the session begins on the same date in even-numbered years.

Ohio's laws can be amended, deleted, or added to - through a legislative process that is outlined in the Ohio Constitution. Over a thousand bills are introduced each legislative session, but only ten to fifteen percent actually become law. Bills that do not become law can not be carried over to the next session.

The legislative process starts when a legislator has an idea for a new law, and requests that the idea be drafted into a "bill" by the Legislative Services Commission (LSC). Legislators also draft bills at the request of the Governor, State Board of Education, or citizens. Citizens also have a mechanism for revising the constitution, or initiating a law through the initiative petition process.

Once the LSC has drafted the bill, the process for considering it is the same in either the House or Senate. The bill is numbered by the chamber's clerk, and "introduced" in the chamber where its title is read on the floor of the chamber. This is called the first reading, or first consideration of the bill.

The bill then moves to the Reference Committee, where the bill may or may not be assigned to a standing committee. If it is assigned, the Reference Committee reports the assignment on the chamber floor, which is called a second consideration.

Once the bill is assigned to a standing committee it may be ignored, given token consideration by having one or two hearings, be voted down, or be approved by a majority of committee members. Committee hearings provide an opportunity for legislators and the public to debate the content of the bill. Legislators can amend the bill, or ask LSC to prepare a substitute bill, if many changes are proposed. The public is invited to testify at scheduled committee hearings in favor, in opposition, or as an interested party of the bill.

If the bill is "passed out of committee favorably" it proceeds to the Rules Committee. The Rules Committee is considered the most powerful standing committee, because the fate of the bill, whether it reaches the floor of the House or Senate for a vote, rests with the committee.

The bill is given its third consideration when it reaches the House or Senate for debate and a vote. A majority vote of members of the chamber is required to pass a bill, except for some emergency and appropriations measures that require a three-fifths vote of the chamber. The bill may be amended, approved, or voted down. If the bill is approved, it moves to the other chamber, where the same legislative process starts over again.

Most bills do not proceed through both chambers without some amendments or changes. If the House and Senate "concur" with the changes made by the other chamber, the bill is considered passed by the General Assembly, enrolled in "act" form, signed by the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate, and presented to the Governor for consideration.

Sometimes the members of the House and Senate cannot agree with the changes to the bill. Then a conference committee, consisting of three members from each chamber, convene to devise a compromise bill. If the conference committee cannot resolve the differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill, the bill fails. If the conference committee recommends to the House and Senate a compromise bill, the House and Senate must agree to the compromise, or the bill fails.

Once the act is presented to the Governor for consideration, the Governor may sign it, veto it, or decline to take action. If the Governor signs the act, it becomes law in 90 days, unless it is an appropriation or emergency legislation. The General Assembly can override a veto by the Governor with a three-fifths vote of both chambers. The act can also become law if the Governor fails to take any action within ten days.

The General Assembly also considers for adoption non-statutory legislation called resolutions. There are different types of resolutions depending upon their purpose. The simplest type of resolution is introduced in one chamber to recognize an individual or event. A concurrent resolution is one that both chambers adopt. A joint resolution is used to ratify amendments to the U.S. Constitution and propose amendments to the Ohio Constitution. Resolutions follow the same legislative process as a bill, but the Governor is not required to sign resolutions.

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