

A Bill Is Introduced

A citizen writes or meets with their representative to share an idea for a new law. A member of Congress introduces legislation and becomes the sponsor. For this chart, the bill will begin in the House of Representatives.

Committee Action

When a bill is introduced, it is referred to a standing committee. This committee is made up of Representatives that are experts on topics like agriculture, education, or international relations—These experts review, research, and revise the bill. They must vote on whether or not to send the bill back to the House floor.

Subcommittee Hearing

If committee members need more information on a bill it is sent to a subcommittee before the House floor. During its time at the subcommittee experts share information and opinions on the bill. Then it is sent back to the committee for approval.

Mark Up

Subcommittees have the option of meeting to mark up a bill. This means they can make amendments (changes) prior to recommending the bill to the full committee. The subcommittee can vote not to report it to the full committee and the bill dies. If they vote yes, it's sent to the House floor.

Committee Action to Report A Bill

When the committee has approved a bill, it is reported (sent) to the House floor. Once reported, a bill is ready to be debated by the U.S. House of Representatives.

Debate & Voting

During debates Representatives are given time to explain why they agree or disagree with the legislation. The reading clerk will read each section of the bill and allow Representatives time to suggest amendments (changes). When all the amendments have been approved, the bill is ready for voting. If the majority vote yes, it passes the U.S. House of Representatives. The Clerk of the House will certify the bill and deliver it to the U.S. Senate.

Referral to the Senate

The bills passed in the House are then referred to the Senate. It will follow a similar route through committee action and floor action. This chamber has four options. They can approve the bill as it is with no changes, make changes, ignore it, or reject it. If the majority of the Senators support the bill by saying, "Yea," then it is ready to go to the president.

Conference Committee

A conference committee's job is to reconcile the differences made to the bill by the House and Senate. If they can't come to an agreement, the legislation dies.

Final Action

Once the conference committee has approved the final look of the bill, it is sent to the president. The president can sign it into law or veto it. A president can also choose to take no action. If the president takes no action while Congress is still in session, it will automatically become a law after ten days. However, if the president takes no action and Congress has already adjourned, then it becomes a "pocket veto," and the legislation dies.

Overriding a Veto

If the president vetoes a bill, Congress can choose to override the veto. In order to override a veto the Senate and the House must pass the bill by a two-thirds majority. Only then can the president's veto be overruled, and the bill would become a law.