

HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

There are basic rules that guide the movement of legislation through the Rhode Island General Assembly. Although these rules vary somewhat from session to session, and although certain exceptions are permitted, generally speaking, bills follow a prescribed course through both chambers of the legislature (the House of Representatives and the Senate) to be enacted into law.

1) The bill is introduced and numbered.

Any Representative (a legislator from the House of Representatives) or Senator (a legislator from the Senate) may introduce a bill in their respective chamber. The Recording Secretary numbers a bill introduced in the House of Representatives. The Secretary of the Senate numbers a bill introduced in the Senate.

2) The bill is referred to a committee.

The Speaker of the House or the President of the Senate refers the bill to the appropriate committee.

3) The committee meets and considers the bill

Committee meeting agendas are posted in advance, and can be found on the [RI General Assembly website](#). The meetings are open to the public, and all members of the public are welcome to give written and/or verbal testimony on the bill once it is introduced. For more information on how to testify, [read our "10 Tips For Testifying Before a Legislative Committee" one-pager](#).

4) At the hearing, the committee may:

- Recommend the bill be passed as introduced
- Recommend it be passed with amendments
- Recommend a substitute bill be passed
- Recommend the bill be considered by another committee
- Recommend the bill be postponed indefinitely, or "held for further study," which means that the bill can be brought up again at a future date, or left in the committee with no action.
- Report the bill to the house floor with no recommendation

5) The bill is debated on the floor.

Following the committee hearing, and if the committee recommends passage of the bill, it is placed on the calendar for consideration, debate, and possible amendment on the floor.

6) They vote.

After the bill has been debated, each member votes. Separate votes are taken on each amendment or change to the bill. If a majority of the legislators present vote in favor of the bill, it passes. Otherwise, the bill fails and does not become law.

7) Repeat steps 1-6 in the other chamber.

If the second house makes changes to the bill, the bill is sent back to the house of origin to consider and vote on any amendments. Upon passage in concurrence by the second house, a bill is forwarded to the Governor. That is, BOTH chambers must pass identical versions of the same bill in order for it to go to the Governor's desk. If the second house does not approve it in committee or it is not considered by the full house, then the bill does not become law.

8) The Governor considers the bill and:

- Signs the bill into law.
- Transmits the bill without a signature, in which case, the bill becomes law unless the Governor also sends a written disapproval, OR
- Vetoes the bill and return it to the legislature (If three-fifths (3/5) of the voting members present approve the bill in both houses, it becomes law despite the Governor's veto.)

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