

HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

STEP 1: The Creation of a Bill

Members of the House or Senate **draft, sponsor** and **introduce** bills for consideration by Congress. The House clerk assigns a legislative number for bills introduced in the House of Representatives (e.g., H.R. 1001) and the Senate clerk assigns a legislative number for bills introduced in the Senate (e.g., S. 1002).

STEP 2: Committee Action

Usually, a committee is assigned to study the bill according to its subject matter. Often a committee will refer the bill to one of its subcommittees. The subcommittee may request reports from government agencies, hold hearings so experts and interested parties have an opportunity to offer testimony regarding the issue, “mark up” or revise the bill, or report the legislation to the full committee for its consideration. The full committee may make a **recommendation to pass the bill**, to revise (i.e., mark up) and release the bill (also known as **reporting the bill out of committee**), or to lay the bill aside (also known as **tabling the bill**).

STEP 3: Floor Action

The bill is returned to the full House or Senate for further **debate and approval**. At this point members may propose amendments to the bill, add additional text, or otherwise alter the bill.

STEP 4: Vote

House and Senate members **vote** on their respective versions of the proposed bill.

STEP 5: Conference Committees

A bill must be approved by both Chambers of Congress. When the Senate amends and agrees to a bill or a version of a bill that the House has already passed or when the House amends and passes a Senate bill or a version of a Senate bill, the two Chambers may begin to resolve any legislative differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill by way of a **conference committee**. When the chambers go to conference, the House and Senate send conferees or representatives to bargain and negotiate. The final compromise is embodied in a **Conference Report** that must be agreed to by both chambers before it is cleared for presidential consideration. The Conference Report will recommend a common version of the measure for approval and will also include statements of legislative intent regarding provisions of the legislation in a Joint Statement of Managers of the Conference.

STEP 6: Presidential Action

After the bill is passed by both Chambers it is sent to the President for his approval or his signature, which if granted creates a **Public Law**. When a President comments on and refuses to sign a bill it is known as a **veto**. A vetoed bill may return to Congress for reconsideration. If the President does not act within 10 days the bill automatically becomes law. If Congress adjourns during the 10 days after the bill is sent to the President and he does not sign it, the bill is automatically vetoed. This process is also known as a **pocket veto**.

STEP 7: The Creation of a Law

The Office of Federal Register assigns the Public Law a number (i.e. P.L. 109-1) and the Government Printing Office prints a copy of it. Laws are issued first in **slip form** or a single publication containing one law. Later it is organized in the order in which it was passed. Finally, it is **codified** into subject order so that all laws on the same topic fall together.

ROLES OF CONGRESSIONAL STAFF

Each member of Congress employs staff to help him/her fulfill his/her legislative duties. Although members of Congress possess complete discretion as to how they set up their office structure, many offices utilize similar staff titles and job functions. Some commonly held positions are:

- **Chief of Staff (COS) or Administrative Assistant (AA):** This individual usually reports directly to a member of Congress. Often he or she is in charge of the overall office operations, including the assignment of work and the supervision of a member's staff.
- **Legislative Director (LD):** The person in this position usually monitors and makes recommendations concerning a Congressional member's legislative agenda, as well as Congress' legislative schedule.
- **Legislative Assistant (LA):** This individual typically monitors specific issues, pieces of legislation and particular constituent requests for a Congressional member. A member of Congress is likely to have several Legislative Assistants, each covering a group of issues. The individuals in this role are often well-versed in the subject matter for which they are responsible.
- **Legislative Counsel:** This individual typically monitors specific issues, pieces of legislation and particular constituent requests for a Congressional member. The individuals in this role are often well-versed in the subject matter for which they are responsible. The legislative counsel serves the same function as the Legislative Assistant, but he/she is usually on a member's committee staff.
- **Press Secretary or Communications Director:** The person in this position is responsible for all communication between a Congressional member and the media, his or her constituents, and the general public.
- **Scheduler or Appointment Secretary:** This individual typically handles a Congressional member's schedule, including travel arrangements, meetings, office visits and other requests.
- **Caseworker:** The individual in this role usually handles constituent requests for help in resolving problems with various federal agencies, as well as other special requests.
- **Legislative Correspondent (LC):** This individual typically prepares communications for a Congressional member's signature and may possess additional duties.
- **Staff Assistant/Receptionist:** This individual usually provides administrative support to other staff members and often has responsibilities related to constituent services, such as conducting tours of the Capitol.