

LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

After the Department of Legislative Reference drafts legislation in the form of a bill or a joint resolution, the sponsor files it, "drops it into the hopper", with the Secretary of the Senate or the Chief Clerk of the House of Delegates. A bill or resolution is numbered, stamped for approval and codification by the Department of Legislative Reference (Senate Rule 26; House Rule 26), and printed for first reading. Senate legislation appears on white paper and House legislation on blue paper.

The Constitution of Maryland requires that before any bill becomes law, it must be read on three different days in each house, for a total of six readings. A bill may not be read for the third time in its house of origin until it has been reprinted. The Constitution also specifies that a bill must be passed in each house by a majority vote of the total membership, and the final vote on third reading in each house must be recorded.

STANDING COMMITTEES

Standing committees are defined as those committees set forth in the Rules of the Senate or the Rules of the House of Delegates (Code State Government Article, sec. 2-101(f)). Their primary function is to consider all legislation referred to them by the Senate President or House Speaker.

To review proposed legislation, the Senate has four standing legislative committees and the House has six (Senate Rule 18; House Rule 18). At the beginning of each session, the Senate President and House Speaker appoint the members of standing committees and designate chairpersons and vice-chairpersons. A senator or delegate may not be appointed to more than one standing committee whose main function is to consider legislation.

The rules of each chamber require every bill to be referred by the presiding officer to the appropriate standing committee (Senate Rule 33; House Rule 33). An exception is made for bills which are strictly local with no statewide impact. Such bills are referred instead to select committees. A select committee is usually composed of a county's delegation in the House or its senators, with other members appointed as necessary to make up the minimum number of three. Counties without home rule keep their select committees busy.

The Senate or House of Delegates may suspend rules in order to consider a bill or resolution without referring it to a standing committee as long as each member receives a copy of the bill or resolution to be so considered (Senate Rule 33(f); House Rule 33(f)).

BUDGET BILL

The Constitution provides for an annual budget bill. Each year, the Governor presents a bill to the General Assembly containing the budget for State

government for the next fiscal year. (In Maryland, the fiscal year begins July 1 and ends June 30.) The budget, however supplemented or amended, must be balanced; total estimated revenues always must be equal to or exceed total appropriations (Const., Art. III, sec. 52(5a)). If the General Assembly has not acted upon the budget bill seven days before the expiration of a regular session, the Governor, by proclamation, may extend the session for action to be taken on the bill. After both houses pass the budget bill, it becomes law without further action (Const., Art. III, sec. 52).

INTRODUCTION OF BILL (1ST READING OF BILL)

A bill may be introduced throughout the ninety days of a session, but the later a bill is introduced, the more difficult its passage becomes. Any Senate bill introduced after the 24th calendar day of a session must be referred to the Senate Rules Committee, cannot be required to be returned to the floor except by a two-thirds vote of the membership, and may not be petitioned from committee (Senate Rule 32). A House bill introduced after the 45th calendar day must be referred to the House Rules and Executive Nominations Committee, requires a two-thirds vote to be returned to the floor, and cannot be petitioned from committee (House Rule 32). For a bill to be introduced during the last 35 days of a session, the rules must be suspended by a two-thirds vote (Const., Art. III, sec. 27). Except for the annual budget bill and bills creating or amending State debts, a House bill that crosses over to the Senate after the 76th day of session is subject to the same restrictions as is a bill introduced after the 24th day.

COMMITTEES

The committee system is a vital part of the legislative process. Rules of each house require that every bill or joint resolution, with one exception, be referred to a standing committee after first reading (Senate Rule 33; House Rule 33). Bills having a purely local impact are referred to select committees composed of the local delegation or the local Senators. The fate of most legislative proposals is determined in committee. Committees hold a public hearing on each bill or joint resolution assigned to them. During session, the Department of Legislative Reference publishes a weekly hearing schedule so that those interested may testify for or against proposed legislation. The Department of Fiscal Services prepares a fiscal analysis for each bill and these fiscal notes are considered during committee deliberations. At the committee hearing, testimony usually is heard from the bill's sponsor and other proponents and opponents of the bill. Testimony and further consideration may result in amendments to the bill made by the committee. The final vote of the committee is recorded by member, and