

The committee system is a vital part of the legislative machinery. 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 are required to 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 is usually 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 may be favorable (with or without amendment), unfavorable, or without recommendation. Having been "voted out of committee," the bill now returns to the floor of its chamber of origin accompanied by a report of committee action.

After consideration of committee amendments, the bill is then open to amendment from the floor. There, committee action may be reversed, although this happens infrequently.

Second reading is completed when the presiding officer orders the bill, with any adopted amendments, printed for third reading. No amendments may be presented on third reading. In the chamber of origin, a recorded vote is taken to pass or reject the bill. To pass, the bill must receive a majority vote of the elected membership.

The bill then passes over to the opposite chamber, has its first reading, and is assigned to a committee for a hearing. The procedure followed is identical with that of the chamber in which the bill originated, except that amendments may be proposed during second and third readings. If not amended in the second chamber, final passage may occur without reprinting.

If amended in the second chamber, the bill is returned to the chamber of origin so that house may consider the amendments. If the chamber of origin votes to concur with the amendments, the bill is voted on as amended and action is complete. The bill is

reprinted, or "enrolled", to include the added amendments before being submitted to the Governor.

If the chamber of origin votes to reject the amendments, the amending chamber may be asked to withdraw its amendments. If it refuses, either chamber may request that a conference committee be appointed to resolve the differences between the two chambers.

Appointed by the Senate President and the House Speaker, a conference committee consists of three members of each house. The committee reports back to both chambers where its recommendations are adopted or rejected without amendment. If the report is adopted, the bill is voted upon for final passage in each house. If the report is rejected by either house, the bill fails.

All bills passed by the General Assembly become law when signed by the Governor, or when passed over the Governor's veto by three-fifths of the membership of each house. According to the Constitution, laws thus approved take effect on the first day of June after the session in which they were passed, except when a later date is specified in the act, or the bill is declared an emergency measure. Most bills now take effect July 1. Emergency bills, passed by three-fifths of the total number of members of each house, become law immediately upon their approval by the Governor.

All bills, except the budget bill and constitutional amendments, must be presented to the Governor within twenty days following adjournment of a session. The Governor may veto such bills within thirty days after presentation. If the Governor does not veto a bill, it becomes law. The budget bill, however, becomes law upon its final passage and cannot be vetoed. Constitutional amendments also cannot be vetoed; they become law only upon their ratification by the voters at the next general election.

The power to override a veto rests with the General Assembly. If the Governor vetoes a bill during a regular session, the General Assembly immediately considers the Governor's veto message. If the Governor vetoes a bill presented after the session, the veto message must be considered immediately at the next regular or special session of the legislature. The General Assembly may not override a veto during the first year of a new legislative term since the bill would have been passed by the previous legislature (Const., Art. II, sec. 17). A three-fifths vote of the elected membership of both chambers is necessary to override a veto.¹

1 For additional information on the legislative process see *Legislative Handbook Series*, 9 vols., Department of Fiscal Services, Annapolis, 1990; *Your Voice in Annapolis*, Maryland General Assembly, Annapolis, n.d.; "Constitution of Maryland" within the Constitutions Article of the