

own officers. The President and Speaker preside over the daily sessions of their respective chambers, maintaining decorum and deciding points of order. As legislation is introduced, they assign it to a standing committee for consideration and a public hearing.

SESSIONS. Since 1971, the General Assembly has convened annually on the second Wednesday in January. Sessions are held in the Senate and House chambers of the State House in Annapolis. Normally, sessions do not exceed ninety consecutive days. The General Assembly may extend its sessions an additional thirty days by resolution passed by three-fifths vote of the membership in each house. The Governor is the only person with the power to call the legislature into special session and in fact must do so on petition of a majority of the elected membership of each house (Const., Art. II, sec. 16; Art. III, sec. 14). No single special session, however, may last longer than thirty days. Special sessions were constitutionally provided for at a time when the General Assembly convened every two years instead of annually, but as recently as 1992, the Governor called the General Assembly into special session twice. The Governor cannot adjourn the General Assembly, but before any proposed adjournment *sine die*, the General Assembly must ask if the Governor wishes to make any further communications to either house (Senate Rule 111; House Rule 111). Both houses must agree to adjourn.

COUNTY LEGISLATION. The General Assembly spends considerable time dealing with local issues, ordinances, and expenditures. The Constitution adopted in 1867 kept the power to pass public local laws vested in the General Assembly. In essence, this gave control of county government to county delegations in the General Assembly. Since 1948, however, thirteen counties and Baltimore City have opted for some form of home rule, allowing the General Assembly a more statewide focus. The Municipal Home Rule Amendment of 1954 virtually prohibits the General Assembly from passing local legislation for incorporated cities and towns, although the Assembly retains its power to pass a general statewide law that affects them (Const., Art. XI-E). Power to regulate elections and to license and regulate the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages, however, is reserved to the General Assembly, and home rule counties are limited to exercising the powers enumerated in the Express Powers Act (Code 1957, Art. 25A, sec. 5).

REFERENDUM. Local bills passed by the General Assembly may include a referendum provision that requires submission of the bill to voter approval. With the exception of a proposed amendment to the Constitution, a statewide bill may not be submitted by the General Assembly to referendum, because such an action has been construed by the courts to constitute a delegation of the legislature's lawmaking powers. Most statewide bills (except appropriations) and any local bill that concerns a county or Baltimore City, however, may

be petitioned to a referendum by the voters. No bill subject to referendum, except an emergency bill, is enforceable until approved by a majority of the voters at the next election. An emergency bill subject to referendum goes into effect upon passage and remains effective for thirty days following its rejection by the voters (Const., Art. XVI).

ADDITIONAL POWERS. The House of Delegates has sole power to impeach officers and judges of the State. A majority of all members of the House must approve any bill of impeachment. The Senate tries all impeachment cases, and two-thirds of the total number of senators must concur in reaching a verdict of guilty (Const., Art. III, sec. 26).

Both houses elect the State Treasurer by joint ballot. The General Assembly also elects the Governor or the Lieutenant Governor if the popular election results in a tie or the winning candidate or candidates are ineligible. If a vacancy occurs in the office of Lieutenant Governor, the Governor nominates a person to succeed to that office upon confirmation by a majority vote of all members of the General Assembly in joint session. If vacancies occur in both the offices of Governor and Lieutenant Governor at the same time, the General Assembly must convene and elect a Governor by a majority vote of all members in joint session. The chosen Governor then nominates a Lieutenant Governor requiring the same confirmation.

The President of the Senate serves as acting Governor if the Lieutenant Governor is unable to do so. Should a vacancy occur in the office of President of the Senate while the President is authorized to serve as acting Governor, the Senate must convene and fill the vacancy (Const., Art. II, secs. 1A, 1B, 6, 7A).

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

Legislators. A constituent's State Senator or Delegate, or the bill's sponsor often are the most effective source of information on proposed laws.

Department of Legislative Services. The Library and Information Services Division of the Department of Legislative Services provides information about the status of bills, the legislative process, and the General Assembly.

Library & Information Services:
 (410) 946-5400, (301) 970-5400
 1-800-492-7122, ext. 3810 (toll free)
 e-mail: libr@mllis.state.md.us
 fax: (410) 946-5405, (301) 970-5405
 tty: (410) 841-3814, or (301) 858-3814

State House Information Desk (ground floor):
 (410) 946-5400, (301) 970-5400

During the legislative session, the Department issues daily synopses of bills introduced. Synopses note primary