

sponsors, committee assignment, and section of the *Annotated Code of Maryland* affected by the proposed law. As with printed bills, Senate synopses are on white paper, House synopses on blue. Issued weekly all year, the Department's *Committee Meetings and Hearing Schedule* shows times and places for legislative committee meetings. It is useful especially during the legislative session, listing what bills will be heard each day.

Synopses and hearing schedules are available at information desks in the State House (ground floor) and Legislative Services Building (basement). Copies of bills and joint resolutions are found at the Bill Room in the Legislative Services Building. A subscription service for bills, synopses, proceedings, and hearing schedules is available from

Distribution Services, Room G-18
90 State Circle, Annapolis, MD 21401
(410) 946-5065, (301) 970-5065
1-800-492-7122, ext. 3885 (toll free)

Each April, immediately after adjournment of the General Assembly, the Department of Legislative Services prepares *The 90 Day Report*. This volume gives an overview of issues considered, legislation passed, and significant bills that failed. Copies may be purchased. The Department also publishes legislative committee reports, various indexes to bills, *Final Status Report of Proposed Legislation*, *Synopsis of Laws Enacted*, journals of both Senate and House, and *Laws of Maryland*.

Office of Legislative Information Systems. Through the World Wide Web, the Office of Legislative Information Systems offers an on-line bill status system, called the Maryland Legislative Information System (MLIS). The Office of Legislative Information Systems is part of the Department of Legislative Services.

The Office's Legislative Subscription Service provides access, for a fee, to continuously updated information. For subscription information, call (410) 946-5300, or (301) 970-5300.

Legislative Caucuses. Legislative caucuses track bills of interest to their members and may issue newsletters. The General Assembly has two formally organized caucuses. The Maryland Legislative Black Caucus was created in 1970. The Women Legislators of Maryland began as the Maryland Chapter of the Order of Women Legislators in 1972.

Newspapers. During a legislative session, newspapers often publish articles about bills introduced and public hearing schedules of General Assembly committees.

THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS: HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

Current laws of the State are compiled in the *Annotated Code of Maryland*. The General Assembly changes, adds, and repeals laws through the legislative process of introducing and passing bills which the Governor later signs into law.

BILLS. Ideas for bills (proposed laws) come from many sources: constituents, the Governor, government agencies, legislative committees, study commissions, special interest groups, lobbyists and professional associations, for example. Each bill, however, must be sponsored by a legislator. The State Constitution mandates that bills be limited to one subject clearly described by the title of the bill and be drafted in the style and form of the *Annotated Code* (Const., Art. III, sec. 29). The one-subject limitation and the title requirement are safeguards against fraudulent legislation and allow legislators and constituents to monitor a bill's progress more easily. Omnibus bills, common in the U.S. Congress, clearly are forbidden under Maryland law.

At the request of legislators, bills are drafted to meet constitutional standards by the Department of Legislative Services until July (the Department starts to receive drafting requests in mid-April, shortly after the session ends). In the interim between sessions, legislators meet in committees, task forces, and other groups to study and formulate bill proposals.

From 1998 through 2000, the number of bills introduced per session has averaged 834 in the Senate and 1,362 in the House of Delegates. This volume of bills makes it difficult for each bill to get through the legislative process within the 90-day session. Therefore, legislators often try to introduce their bills as early as possible. A bill filed with the Secretary of the Senate or the Chief Clerk of the House prior to the first day of a regular session is called a prefiled bill. Such a bill is introduced (i.e., read across the floor) and assigned to a standing committee on the opening day of a session, thus obtaining a head-start advantage. In 2000, some 80 Senate bills and 90 House bills were prefiled.

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 General Assembly may reduce the Governor's budget proposals, but it may not increase them. The budget, however, whether it is 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,