

HOW A BILL BECOMES LAW IN CALIFORNIA

All legislative bills start as an idea. Any individual or group can bring an idea for a new law or a change in an existing law to a state legislator. If a Senator or Assembly member decides to author the idea and take it through the official steps, it is first drafted into legal language called a bill.

FIRST READING ~

- A bill is introduced into the Assembly or the Senate and given a number beginning with AB or SB to indicate which house it starts in; then it is sent to the Office of State Printing.
- No bill may be acted upon until it has been in print for 30 days.

COMMITTEE HEARINGS ~

- Each bill is assigned to appropriate policy committees where it is scheduled for one or more hearings. Bills that require money or have fiscal implications must also be heard in the fiscal committee.
- Anyone can speak for or against a bill before or during hearings. Letters of support or opposition are important and should be mailed to committee members well before the hearing date.
- A majority vote of the full committee is required for a bill to be approved and "passed out" of the committee.

SECOND AND THIRD READINGS ~

- Bills passed by committees are read a second time and then placed on file for a third reading.
- When a bill is read the third time it is explained to the full house by its author, discussed by the Members during the floor debate, and voted on by a roll call vote.
- Most bills need a majority vote (21 votes in the Senate and 41 votes in the Assembly) to be passed; but bills that require money or are urgency bills (take effect immediately) require a two-thirds vote (27 in the Senate and 54 in the Assembly) for passage.
- If a bill is defeated the Member may seek reconsideration and another vote

REPEAT PROCESS IN OTHER HOUSE ~

Once a bill has been approved by the house of origin, it proceeds through the second where the same hearing and review procedure is repeated.

RESOLUTION OF DIFFERENCES ~

- A bill that is amended in the second house must go back to the first house for agreement on the amendments (concurrence). If agreement cannot be reached, the bill moves to a two-house conference committee (3 members of the Assembly and 3 members of Senate) to resolve differences.
- Conference committee hearings are open to the public and are at other times when citizen influence can help legislators arrive at a decision.
- If the committee reaches a compromise, the final version is returned to both houses for a vote.
- When approved by both the Senate and Assembly, the bill then goes to the Governor.

GOVERNOR ~

- The Governor has three choices when a bill reaches his desk. He can sign it into law, allow it to become law without his signature or veto it
- A final and very important time for citizen participation in the bill process is when the bill reaches the Governor's desk. Letters and phone calls received by the Governor's office are taken into consideration when he decides whether to sign or veto a bill.
- If the Governor vetoes the bill, it returns to the house of origin where the author may ask for a vote to override the veto. It requires two-thirds vote of both houses to override the Governor's veto.
- Urgency measures take effect immediately after they are signed; other bills usually become effective the following January 1st.