



The California Legislative Process

The process of government by which bills are considered and laws enacted is commonly referred to as the Legislative Process. The California State Legislature is made up of two houses: the Senate and the Assembly. There are 40 Senators and 80 Assembly Members representing the people of the State of California.

Idea: All legislation begins as an idea or concept. The process begins when a Senator or Assembly Member decides to author a bill.

The Author: A Legislator sends the idea for the bill to the Legislative Counsel where it is drafted into the actual bill. The draft of the bill is returned to the Legislator for introduction. If the author is a Senator, the bill is introduced in the Senate. If the author is an Assembly Member, the bill is introduced in the Assembly. No bill may be acted upon until 30 days has passed from the date of its introduction.

Committee Hearings: Bills are assigned to policy committees according to the subject area of the bill. Bills that require the expenditure of funds must also be heard in the fiscal committee (Appropriations). Each house has a number of policy committees and a fiscal committee. During the committee hearing, the author presents the bill to the committee and testimony can be heard in support or opposition of the bill. The committee then votes by passing the bill, passing the bill as amended, or defeating the bill. Bills can be amended several times. Letters of support or opposition are important and should be mailed to the author and committee members before the bill is scheduled to be heard in committee. It takes a majority vote of the full committee membership for a bill to be passed by the committee.

Second and Third Reading: Bills passed by committees are read a second time on the floor in the house of origin and then assigned to third reading. When a bill is read the third time it is explained by the author, discussed by the Members and voted on by a roll call vote. Bills that require an appropriation or that take effect immediately, generally require 27 votes in the Senate and 54 votes in the Assembly to be passed. Other bills generally require 21 votes in the Senate and 41 votes in the Assembly. If a bill is defeated, the Member may seek reconsideration and another vote.

Repeat Process in Other House: Once the bill has passed in the house of origin, it proceeds to the other house where the procedure is repeated.

Resolution of Differences: If a bill is amended in the second house, it must go back to the house of origin for concurrence, which is agreement on the amendments. If agreement cannot be reached, the bill is referred to a two house conference committee to resolve differences. Three members of the committee are from the Senate and three are from the Assembly. If a compromise is reached, the bill is returned to both houses for a vote.

Governor: If both houses approve a bill, it then goes to the Governor. The Governor has three choices. The Governor can sign the bill into law, allow it to become law without his or her signature, or veto the bill. A governor's veto can be overridden by a two thirds vote in both houses. Most bills go into effect on the first day of January of the next year unless a different operative date is specified in the legislation..