

How a Bill Becomes Law

How does the New Hampshire legislative process work? The New Hampshire state website ((from <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/misc/legprocess.html>) provides the following primer on the legislative process.

Introducing a Bill: While any of us may have an idea for legislation, only State Representatives and Senators can file a bill with the Office of Legislative Services. A carefully drafted bill is signed by the Senator or Representative who is the prime sponsor (and co-sponsors, if desired) and submitted to the Clerk's office. The Senate President or House Speaker, after a formal "reading" of the bill, then assigns the bill to the appropriate House/Senate standing committee for a public hearing.

Public Hearing: Hearings must be announced to the public at least 72 hours in advance through the House/Senate Calendar. At the bill's public hearing, supporting and opposing testimony is heard from all interested parties. Following the public hearing (not usually the same day), the Committee members vote to pass the legislation, amend it, refer it back to the Committee for further study, or defeat the legislation. The Committee's decision then goes to the floor of the House or Senate for a vote by the full body.

Floor Action: The bill is then placed on the House/Senate Calendar for a "floor vote", where a Committee member presents the Committee's decision. Floor debate may follow, with legislators who oppose the Committee's decision speaking alternately with legislators who support the Committee. It is rare for the full Senate or House to overturn a Committee's decision. After debate, the full body votes on the Committee's decision. The results of the body floor action can be found in the House/Senate Journals.

Referral to the Other Legislative Body: If the bill is defeated or is referred for study, it does not pass to the other legislative body. If the bill passes or passes with amendments, it is referred to the other house of the legislature for another committee hearing and full body vote. Crossover day is the deadline for all House bills to go to the Senate and all Senate bills to go to the House.

To the Governor: If both the House and Senate pass a bill or agree on an amended version (every bill must be passed in identical form by the two bodies before it can be sent to the Governor), it then goes to the Governor's desk for approval. The Governor has five days to veto the bill or, if the Governor takes no action within five days, the bill passes into law.

Overriding a Veto: If the bill is vetoed, it takes 2/3 of both the House and the Senate to override the Governor's action and pass the bill into law.

Citizen Participation: You have many opportunities to impact this process, including testifying at hearings, writing letters or making phone calls to your representatives, or working with organizations to create awareness of the possible impact of a piece of legislation. You should know that New Hampshire's "citizen legislature" is a great source of state pride, and that Representatives and Senators welcome phone calls at home since most of them don't have offices at the State House, and have little or no staff to help them gather information. To contact your Legislator you may call the House Clerk's office (603) 271-2548 or the Senate Clerk's office (603) 271-3420 for more information.