

## Courtesy of Judy Fitzpatrick, Short Pump Elementary

### How Bills Become Laws

The process of introducing legislation to be considered by the General Assembly and ultimately enacted into law is one of the most important responsibilities of a Senator or a Delegate. The [Constitution of Virginia](#), the [Rules of the Senate](#), and the [Rules of the Virginia House of Delegates](#) outline the process bills must go through become law. The following outline depicts the various steps required for an idea to be considered and passed by the General Assembly, and approved by the Governor:

Bills may originate in either the Senate or the House of Delegates.

A Senator or Delegate, as requested by constituents, prepares to introduce legislation. (For example: Permitting the governing bodies of localities to prohibit the sale and use of certain fireworks)

The Senator or Delegate then explains exactly the proposal he/she has in mind to a staff attorney in the Division of Legislative Services. A staff attorney checks existing law and the constitutionality of the proposed legislation.

The bill is then drafted by the Division of Legislative Services. Draft copies of the bill are made and delivered to the Senator or Delegate.

The member signs his/her name on the bill and introduces it by laying the original and duplicate copies on the desk of the Clerk (of the Senate or of the House of Delegates).

The bill is ordered printed and referred by the Senate Clerk or the House Speaker to the appropriate Standing Committee. (The Senate has 11 Standing Committees and the House of Delegates has 14 Standing Committees.)

The members of the Committee -in public session- study, discuss, and vote on the bill.

The Committee then reports ("approves") the bill, with or without amendments, to the originating body (Senate or House of Delegates).

The [Constitution, within Article IV, Section 11](#), requires that every bill have three readings on three calendar days.

First Reading: The bill title is printed in the Calendar (the daily printed

agenda of business) or is read by the Clerk.

Second Reading: The next day the bill title appears in its respective Calendar. Bills are considered in the order in which they appear in the Calendar. The Clerk of the Senate/House of Delegates reads the title of the bill.

A bill on second reading is amendable. Any amendments are taken up and agreed to or rejected. By voice vote, the bill is engrossed and passed to its third reading.

A bill that has passed the second reading with or without amendments is engrossed

If amendments are adopted, the bill is rewritten with amendments included and reprinted in its engrossed form for passage.

Third Reading: The next day, the engrossed bill title appears in the calendar on third reading. The bill is read by title by the Clerk. By a recorded vote, the bill is passed.

Communication: When passed, the bill is sent to the other house for its consideration.

In the other body's chamber: The bill goes through substantially the same procedure as it did in the originating body.

The bill is read by title a first time, then the bill is referred to a Standing Committee, considered and reported by the Standing Committee, read a second time and a third time before passage by a constitutional majority.

If there are differences between the Senate and House versions of the bill, a Committee of Conference is created to resolve them.

After the bill has been passed by both houses of the General Assembly, it is printed as an enrolled bill, and examined and signed by the presiding officer of each house.

The bill is sent to the Governor for approval, where the Governor may 1) sign the bill into law; 2) amend the bill and return it to the General Assembly for approval; 3) veto the bill and return it to the General Assembly, where the House of Delegates and the Senate may override the veto by a two-thirds vote of both houses; or, 4) take no action and the bill becomes law without the Governor's signature.

After being signed by the Governor, the bill is sent to the Clerk of the House of Delegates (Keeper of the Rolls of the Commonwealth) and is assigned a Chapter number. All Chapters of a Session are compiled and bound as the Acts of Assembly.

Bills enacted at a Regular Session (or the Reconvened Session which follows) are effective the 1st day of July following adjournment of the Regular Session, unless another date is specified.

Bills enacted at a Special Session (or Reconvened Session) are effective the 1st day of the fourth month following the adjournment of the Special Session, unless another date is specified.

The General Appropriations Act is usually effective July 1st and Emergency Acts become effective when signed by the Governor.