



Colorado General Assembly How a Bill becomes a Law

Overall: It is easier to defeat a bill than to get a bill through the legislative gauntlet. Every bill introduced will receive a hearing.

Legislator

- Can only submit 5 bills each session, unless granted permission by leadership.
- Must submit bills by a specified date, unless granted permission by leadership for a late bill.
- Finds a supportive legislator in the other chamber as a sponsor and lines up co-sponsors.
- Works with legislative services to draft language consistent with state statute.
- Legislators are anxious to pass bills under their own names to demonstrate to their constituents their commitment to working for the good of Colorado and their district.

Title

In Colorado the title of a bill is extremely important and legislators are careful in how they craft the title. Under the Colorado constitution, a measure cannot cover more than one issue. Additionally, the bill cannot be amended unless the amendment conforms with the title. Unfriendly amendments have even occurred which erased the bill entirely and replaced it with new language. Sometimes amendments are applied which have strategic intent for election purposes.

First reading is when the bill is read across by the clerk in the first chamber of reference (house or senate). The bill is then assigned to a committee of reference by the majority leadership of the chamber. Sometimes the leadership will assign the bill to several committees. State, Veterans and Military Affairs committee is often used by the leadership for bills they do not want to see continue. All bills with a fiscal note must be approved by the Appropriations Committee before going to the "committee of the whole" (the house or senate chamber). Appropriations can defeat the bill for any reason, not just monetary. No testimony is taken at Appropriations.

Committee Hearings

The committee of reference takes public testimony and discusses the bill. It will consider amendments and then vote whether or not to approve the bill. Bills that are approved by a majority of the committee then go on to the next committee of reference, which could be another committee or the committee of the whole. Bills that fail to receive a majority of votes in committee are usually considered for postponing indefinitely (PI). Bills that are PI'ed are dead for the session. Committee hearings (except Appropriations) generally occur in the afternoons or after adjournment of the Committee of the Whole. They also have a set meeting weekly schedule, although this may all change towards the end of the session. Only rarely will a committee meet on Friday. A bill hearing must appear on the calendar at least 48-hours before it is to be considered.

2nd Reading

Occurs with the Committee of the Whole (entire House or Senate).

Bills, as amended by committee(s), are presented to the entire chamber and are debated.

Citizens may observe from the gallery, but no public testimony is taken.

Bills can be amended at 2nd reading.

When a vote is taken, if the bill is defeated, it is considered dead (although occasionally there is a parliamentary move to reconsider).

The votes on second reading are not recorded, unless someone does a parliamentary maneuver to ensure recording of the votes.

3rd Reading

In order to obtain approval of a chamber, the bill must be approved on a 3rd reading.

Therefore, every legislator has an opportunity to rethink his or her vote on a bill (and sometimes get an earful from the citizenry).

It is generally considered bad form to offer amendments to a third reading of a bill, and legislators have to receive permission of the chamber to offer one.

3rd reading votes are final and are recorded. Votes appear in the journal of the chamber.

On to the Other Chamber

After the bill passes 3rd reading, it then proceeds to the other chamber for the same 3 readings. The successful amendments from the first chamber are incorporated into an “engrossed” bill.

Resolving Differences Between Chambers

After a bill passes 3rd reading in the second chamber, it heads to the Governor for his signature or veto, unless the 2nd chamber or committees amended the bill. Those Amended bills are sent back to the first chamber, where a concurrence vote is sought.

If the first chamber does not concur with the changes applied by the second chamber, a conference committee is appointed to work out the differences. The bill that emerges from the conference committee must be approved by both chambers before heading to the Governor.

Governor:

Governor may choose to sign, veto, or take no action on a bill. A bill becomes law if:

- Governor signs
- 2/3 of each chamber overrides the Governor’s veto
- Governor fails to sign after 10 days during session or 30 days after legislature adjourns.

Budgetary Process

In mid-March legislative attention turns to the state budget and the Long bill (because it is very long). This bill funds the entire state government. The Long bill is a product of the Joint Budget Committee (JBC), a powerful bipartisan committee that works closely all session focused on the state budget.