

HOW A BILL BECOMES LAW

An Idea . . .

Proposed new laws or amendments to existing laws are introduced by individual members in the House or Senate in the form of bills as required by the Constitution.

◆ **A member of the General Assembly submits his/her ideas in writing** to the Legislative Reference Bureau, the bill drafting agency of the General Assembly. The bill is drafted and signed by the member as the Prime Sponsor and then distributed to other members of the legislative body for co-sponsorship.

◆ **The bill is introduced by being read across the desk in the appropriate chamber** (House or Senate) and is then referred to the respective committee. This is done by the President in the Senate or the Speaker in the House. Every bill, when introduced, is numbered and printed for the members of the House, the Senate, and for public distribution.

◆ **The Senate and House committees are the workshops of the General Assembly.** There are 21 Senate Standing Committees and 26 House Standing Committees. It is their duty to study carefully the bills which are to be reported with favorable recommendation to their respective houses. **Members are assigned to Committees** by the President Pro Tempore and the Speaker of the House respectively. Chairpersons are awarded on the basis of tenure and experience. A quorum is necessary to conduct a meeting, and all meetings are open to the public.

—**Once a bill is in committee, the committee has full power over it.** Sometimes it is referred by the chairperson to a subcommittee to do a further study of the issue and to make a report or recommendation to the main committee. Persons or organizations interested in a proposed bill may request a public hearing on the matter through the chairperson to the committee.

◆ **After a committee has considered a bill, it may report the bill from said committee to the floor of the chamber as committed** (no changes), **or as amended** (changes). If amended, the bill is sent to the printer for reprinting. The committee by a majority vote may decide not to report the bill at all.

◆ **It is required that each bill be considered on three different days** in both

the Senate and the House. On first consideration, in each chamber, amendments and debate are not permitted. On second consideration amendments may be proposed from the floor, if they are germane to the subject of the bill.

—If amended, the bill must be reprinted. The next step is considering the bill for the third time and advancing it to final passage. The bill may be amended on third consideration. However, the bill on final passage may not be amended, but is open to debate. If a constitutional majority of twenty-six senators vote in favor of the bill, the bill passes the Senate. Some special class appropriation bills require two-thirds of the elected membership of each house.

◆ **After the bill passes the Senate it is transmitted to the House** and is handed over to the Speaker who then refers it to one of the House standing committees.

◆ **The House committee process is the same as the Senate.**

◆ **If the bill is reported from a House committee, it follows somewhat the same course of passage as in the Senate except in the area of first consideration.** When the bill is given first consideration it is not automatically moved on to second consideration but is laid on the table. It may be removed from the table by a motion of the majority leader, acting on a report of the Rules committee. Such report must be in writing and a copy thereof distributed to each member. When the bill is removed from the table it is placed on Second consideration. If the bill remains on the table for 15 legislative days it is automatically removed from the table and placed on the calendar for Second consideration.

—Second consideration, Third consideration, and final passage procedures are the same as in the Senate, with a constitutional majority of 102 votes being required for final passage in the House.

—The House may amend a Senate Bill, in which case it is returned to the Senate for concurrence in the House Amendments. (All Senate bills amended in the House and all House bills amended in the Senate must first pass through their respective Rules Committee before coming to the floor for a vote.) A Constitutional yea or nay vote is required to concur. The Senate may amend House bills in the same manner.

Either house may defeat a bill of the other house, either in committee or on the floor.

◆ Should the Senate refuse to agree to the amendments made by the House (and vice versa), the bill usually goes to Conference committee made up of three members from each Chamber, appointed by the presiding officers, to resolve the differences and to then report to their respective houses for a vote to adopt the Conference committee report. A constitutional majority is required.

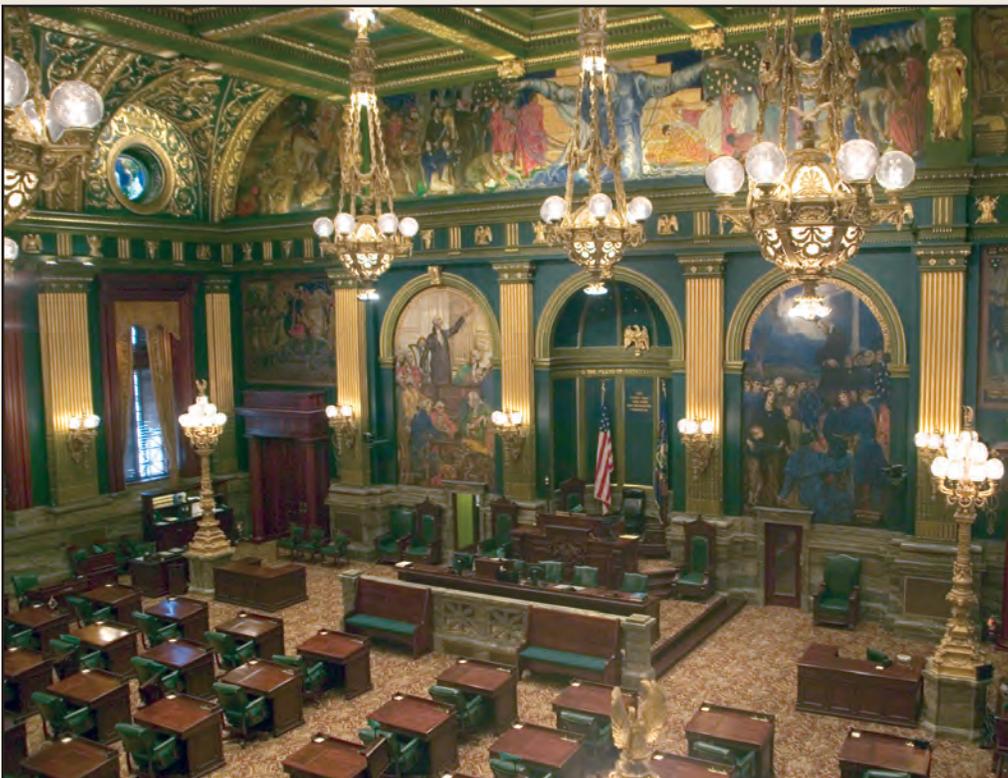
◆ When a bill has finally passed in both houses, it is signed by the President of the Senate (Lieutenant Governor) or President Pro Tempore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House. It is then transmitted to the Governor for his consideration. The Governor may consult the Attorney General for opinion as to the legality and constitutionality of the legislation. If the Governor signs the bill it becomes law. If the Governor vetoes the bill, it is returned to the house of origin together with the Governor's reasons for the veto. The veto can be overturned by a two-thirds vote of each house.

—If the Governor does not act upon the bill within ten calendar days after it has been received by him, while the General Assembly is in session, it automatically becomes law. After final adjournment of the General Assembly, the Governor has 30 days to act upon the remaining bills on his desk. Bills on which he takes no action automatically become law. It is rare for a bill to become law by reason of the Governor taking no action.

◆ The official certified copy of each bill approved by the Governor is placed in the custody of the Secretary of the Commonwealth, given an act number, and filed in the State Department. The Legislative Reference Bureau, the agency in which the bill originated, prepares the act for printing. The Bureau then publishes the acts in book form, known as the Pamphlet Laws, for distribution to the courts, attorneys, libraries, and the citizens of the Commonwealth who may request them.

Proper consideration of bills requires much time and a lot of hard work. Much of this work is done in committee rooms before daily floor sessions and before a bill reaches the floor of either House. What the visitor sees is the final committee approval of all the hours of work that has been done before a bill is submitted to the floor for action by the whole Senate.

... becomes a law.



THE SENATE CHAMBER
Photo by Jim Haberski

THE RICHLY-APPOINTED SENATE CHAMBER is where Pennsylvania's 50 state senators meet to debate and vote upon legislation and resolutions. Groundbreaking female artist Violet Oakley spent more than eight years completing the murals. The desks are constructed of mahogany and imported from Belize. The drapes weigh 87 pounds per pair and the bronze light fixtures weigh 2 tons each.