



Maryland General Assembly 101

Introduction

The Maryland General Assembly (MGA) is the legislative body that writes and passes laws for the state of Maryland. The General Assembly passes general and local laws, raises revenue to fund State services, and oversees the operation of the State Executive Agencies.

The General Assembly has two bodies: the Senate with 47 members, and the House of Delegates with 141 members. Maryland is divided into 47 legislative districts. Each district is represented by one senator and three delegates. Each member is elected to serve for four years, with the next election for members of the General Assembly will be in 2026. For more information about Maryland's electoral process, [visit the Maryland Board of Elections site](#).

Each year, the Maryland General Assembly meets for the 90-day legislative session. The session starts in early-January, and ends in mid-April. During this time, the legislature considers thousands of bills and balances the state's budget. The legislative session is the only time a bill (a proposed new law) can be considered for passage.

During the session, the General Assembly is required to pass a new state budget that will go into effect on July 1st of that year. [Learn more about the budget process here](#).

The Legislative Process

In order to become law, a bill has to successfully pass a series of processes and votes. Once a bill is sponsored by a member of the General Assembly and drafted by the Department of Legislative Services, it gets introduced in the legislators respective chamber. Before introduction, the bill sponsor will receive a draft copy of the bill called a "blue back" and can use this to collect cosponsors on the bill. In order to cosponsor a bill, a legislator must initial next to their name on the cover of the blue back.

If an identical piece of legislation is introduced by a member of the House of Delegates and the Senate, it is called a cross-file. Each respective chamber has an introduction deadline, and all legislation must be introduced before this date. Once introduced, a bill is read for First Reader. At this point, the clerk for the respective chamber announces the bill number and the committee the bill will be referred to. Each chamber has committees that handle bills on certain and specific issue areas.

Once referred to a Committee, a bill must have a Committee Hearing. The Committee Chairperson sets the date for the hearing. At the hearing, the bill sponsor has the opportunity to make their case for why the bill is necessary. After the sponsor, members of the public have the opportunity to testify virtually, in person, or with written testimony, for or against the bill. The bill hearing is the

only time for public testimony on the legislation. As powerful speakers with personal stories can have a large influence over the Legislators, the hearing is a crucial part of the legislative process. For more information on Committee membership and subject areas, [click here](#).

After the Committee Hearing, the Committee must vote to send the bill back to the respective chamber's floor. The Committee Chairperson has a lot of authority over if and how the bill will pass out of their committee. The Committee can: vote the bill favorably without amendments, vote the bill favorably with amendments changing the original language, vote the bill unfavorably, or not vote at all. If a bill is voted unfavorably or not voted on at all, it is "dead" in that chamber. If the bill is voted favorably, it heads back to the chamber's floor for Second reader.

At Second reader, the bill is reported back to the full chamber with the committee's recommendation. If the committee has amended the legislation, the full body must vote on each amendment, and then subsequently voted on by the full body as a whole. During second reader, any member of the body can offer an amendment to the bill. Each proposed floor amendment is voted on by the full body. If the bill passes Second reader, it is printed with all of the successful amendments and moves to Third reader.

In the opposite chamber, the bill retains its bill number and moves through the same legislative process as the originating chamber. In order to move forward, the opposite chamber must also refer the bill to a committee, pass the bill out of committee, and pass second and third reader. If the opposite chamber makes additional amendments, the originating chamber must vote on the additional amendments. If they vote favorably, the bill is prepared to be sent to the Governor's desk for signature.

If the originating chamber rejects the opposite chamber's amendments, the opposite chamber may either withdraw their amendments, or the bill goes to a conference committee where members of each chamber negotiate a compromise. If they reach a compromise the bill must be voted on once more by each chamber. If the vote fails, or the conference committee does not reach a compromise, the legislation is "dead."

Once a piece of legislation has passed both chambers, it must be presented to the Governor for signature within 20 days of the conclusion of the legislative session. The Governor has 30 days to sign or veto a bill. If the Governor does not sign or veto a bill within 30 days, it becomes law. If the Governor does veto a bill, the General Assembly can pass a veto-override vote at the beginning of the next legislative session. In order to override the Governor's veto, three-fifths of each chamber must vote in favor.

For more information and to see a flowchart on the legislative process, [click here](#).