

HOW A BILL BECOMES LAW IN TENNESSEE

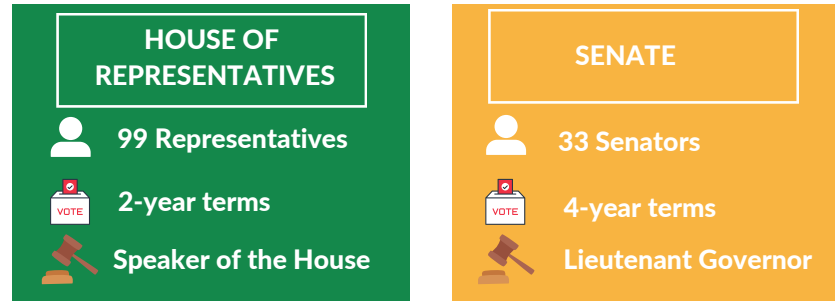
The Tennessee General Assembly convenes two-year legislative sessions beginning on the second Tuesday in January of every odd year. Sessions do not have a set end date, but they are budgeted for 90 session days over the two-year period with sessions typically ending each year in late April or early May.

Throughout the session, legislators discuss **bills** proposing, amending, or deleting state laws, as well as **resolutions** that express legislators' views -- oftentime recognizing or memorializing individuals. Bills are either "general" with a statewide impact or "local," impacting a particular town or county. And resolutions can either be of one chamber, *i.e.*, a House Resolution, or of both, *i.e.*, a House Joint Resolution.

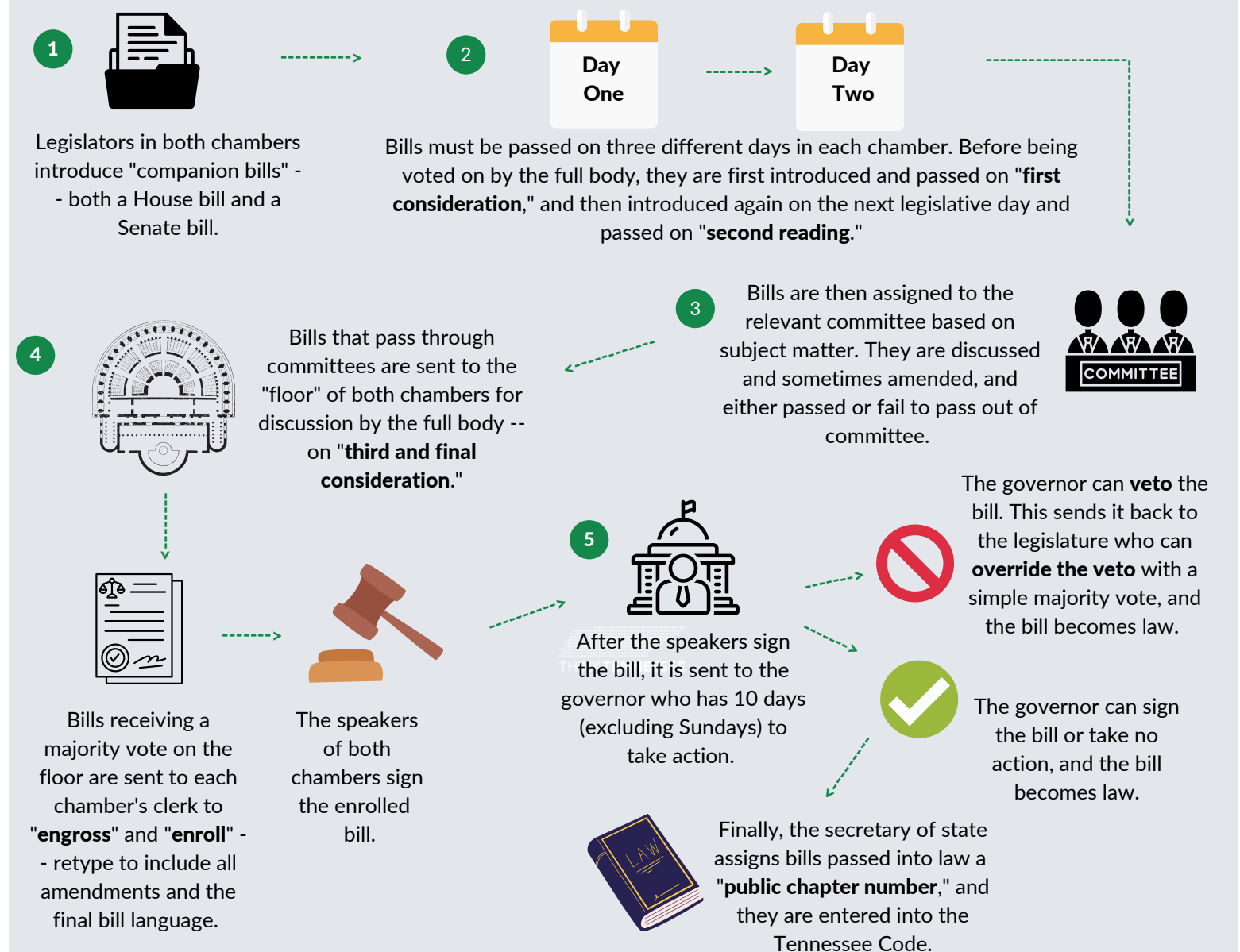
This brief outlines the path from introduction to passage of general bills with statewide impact.

The Tennessee General Assembly

The General Assembly is made up of two chambers, the **House** (99 members) and the **Senate** (33 members). Each are elected to different term lengths and are led by a "speaker," also known as the lieutenant governor in the Senate.



How Bills Become Laws in Tennessee





1 Legislators Introduce Bills

Each legislator may introduce, or “sponsor,” bills each session. Each bill must have a **companion bill**, meaning that a bill filed in the House by a representative must also be filed in the Senate by a senator. The chief clerks of the House and Senate review the filed bills to make sure they conform to the legislative rules, and then they give each bill a number. The bill-filing deadline, when all bills for the year are introduced, is announced at the start of each session and is typically by early February.

Initially, bills may contain the language legislators intend to present for discussion, or they may simply identify a section of the Tennessee Code the bill will address. These bills are called **caption bills**, and they are designed to be placeholders while the final language is developed. Sponsors can amend these bills to turn them into anything addressing that section of the Code even after the bill-filing deadline.



2 Bills Assigned to Committees

Tennessee's Constitution states that no bill shall become law until it has been considered and passed on **three different days** in each house. This means that a bill is first introduced in each chamber and passed without objection on two consecutive days. They are introduced and passed on “**first consideration**,” and then introduced again on the next legislative day and passed on “**second reading**.”

This typically looks like majority leaders introducing bills in a procedural motion, reading out bill numbers in quick succession and then the chamber passing all of the bills without objection. There is typically not substantial discussion of any bills during these first two readings.

After the second reading, bills are referred to the chambers' speakers who then refer them to the appropriate committees. If a committee chair deems a bill not controversial, it may be placed on a committee **consent calendar**. Consent calendars are voted on as a whole. Unless a member requests to discuss a particular bill, these individual bills are not discussed. For all other bills, the sponsor appears before the committee to explain the bill.

If a bill stays in committee for seven days without any action being taken on it, or if a sponsor fails to appear before the committee to discuss the bill, it may be recalled or withdrawn.



3 Legislators Discuss Bills in Committees

Committees meet on a regular schedule with a calendar of bills to discuss each week. Bill sponsors present their bill to the committee who then decides whether the bill moves on to the next step.

Presenting a Bill

At least two committee members must agree to hear a bill, allowing the bill sponsor to present and discuss their proposed legislation. The sponsor describes their bill, and committee members can ask questions of the sponsor, share their support or opposition to it, or make suggested amendments.

The budgetary impact of bills may also be discussed. The legislature's Office of Fiscal Review analyzes proposed bills with a budgetary impact and assigns a **"fiscal note"** to the bill. A large fiscal note can be a significant hurdle to a bill's passage as committee members may question whether the sponsor has accounted for the estimated financing.

Members of the public or agencies who would be affected by the bill have an opportunity to testify to voice either their support or opposition. Rules and procedures for testimony vary by chamber and committee.

Committee Testimony

Procedures for testifying in committee will differ, from the amount of notice required and the amount of time allotted to testify. Those wishing to testify should contact the committee chair's office to find out the appropriate rules.

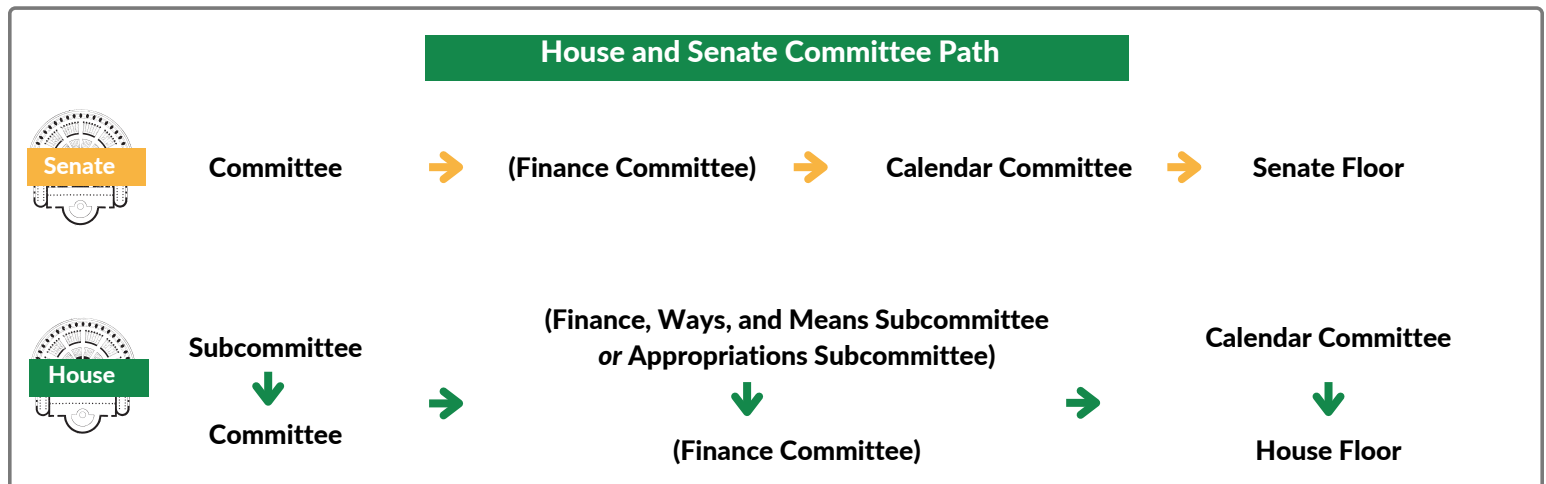
Amendments

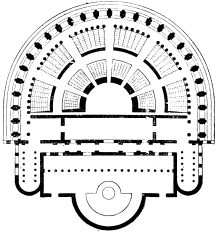
Bills can be amended at any point in the process -- including on the chamber floor. Once amended, they continue on from where they are. They do not have to start the process over again.

Committee Votes

After discussion of a bill, committee members may pass or fail to pass a bill with a majority vote, or they may allow the sponsor to continue working on the bill -- to make any suggested amendments that arose during the discussion. If this happens, the bill is **"rolled"** to a later week's calendar of the committee and discussed again.

Once passed, the bill is sent to the next step in the process -- from subcommittee to committee, and so forth. If the bill impacts the state's budget, it is sent to the Finance Committee to be approved.





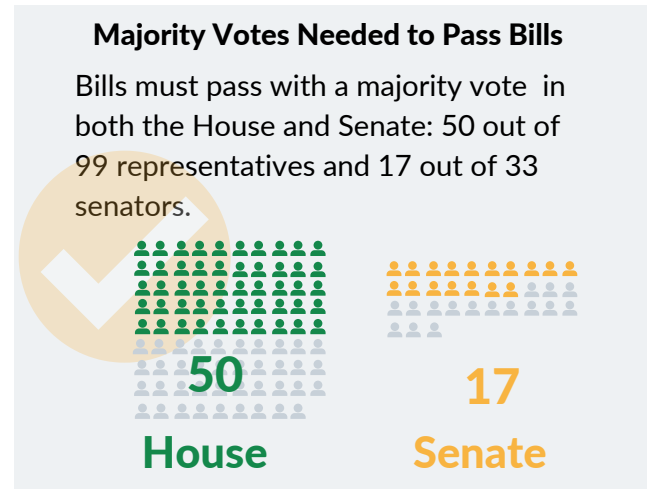
4 Bills Passed on Third and Final Consideration

After bills have travelled the necessary steps through committees, they are placed on the chamber's floor calendar for the **third and final consideration**. Sponsors present their bill one last time before all members of the chamber. Any member may ask questions and introduce an amendment to the bill again at this time.

Companion bills often move through committees in both chambers at the same time, but one chamber will pass it on the floor before the other. After one chamber passes a bill, it is then "**engrossed**" and sent to the other who "**conforms and substitutes**" to that version of the bill. This means that the bill becomes the version passed by the other chamber, so that they are working with the same bill language.

If the House and Senate do not agree on the language for a bill they have received as passed from the other, they may amend it. If one chamber passes a different version than the other, the bill is sent back to the first chamber as amended, and they vote on the bill again.

This process continues until agreement is reached. If the two chambers cannot reach agreement, a **conference committee** made up of at least three members of each chamber meet to reconcile the differences between the two bills. If the committee reaches agreement, its agreed upon language is final, it cannot be amended.



5 Bills Become Laws

After a bill is passed by both chambers, it is "**enrolled**" into its final version and signed by both chamber's presiding officers, the speaker of the House and the lieutenant governor. It is then transmitted to the governor who has 10 days (excluding Sundays) to take action on it.

The bill becomes law if the governor signs it, or if after 10 days the governor does nothing, it becomes law without a signature. The governor may also veto the bill, or reduce or disapprove any sum of money appropriated in the bill. This sends the bill back to the legislature who can override the governor's veto with a majority vote in each body to make the bill law.

Finally, the secretary of state assigns a general bill that has been passed into law a "**public chapter number**" and it is added to the Tennessee Code. Each bill's language will specify whether it becomes law immediately -- at this stage in the process -- or at a later date.

Overriding a Gubernatorial Veto

A simple majority vote in the legislature (50 votes in the House and 17 votes in the Senate) can override a gubernatorial veto.