

Making Law In Pennsylvania

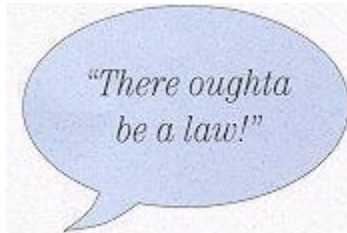


Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

House of Representatives

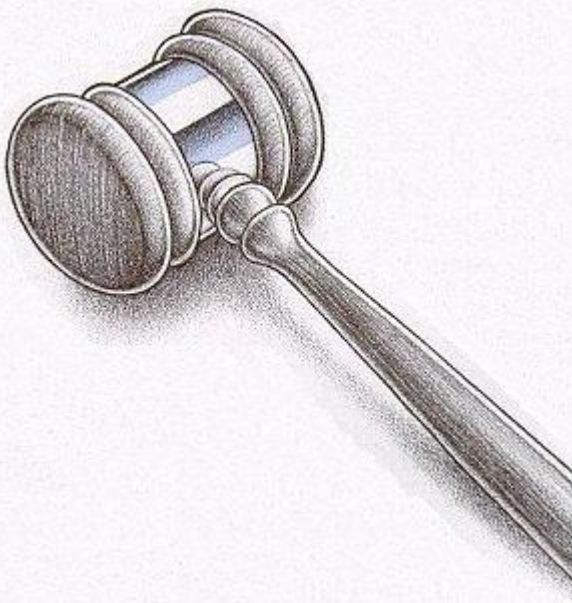


Making Law In Pennsylvania



Have
you
ever
wished
that
government

would just step in and pass a law to correct some situation you find totally unacceptable? Fortunately for all of us, it's not that simple. Making law in Pennsylvania is a meticulous process -- and for good reason. State laws influence our environment, economy, education, our families, our health and virtually every aspect of our daily lives, now and for generations to come. To make new laws or change those already on the books, lawmakers follow time-honored Constitutional procedures. On the following pages, you'll see how a



legislative system developed centuries ago still works today, both for lawmakers and the Pennsylvanians who send them to Harrisburg. Then, the next time you wish your legislators would just "lay down the law," you'll have a good idea of what it takes to make it happen.



There is much to be proud of in Pennsylvania. Magnificent land, steadfast citizens, lasting traditions, resilient spirit -- and a system of government that has sustained Pennsylvania and the nation for over 300 years. Making Law in Pennsylvania is one of a series of booklets we at the House of Representatives have prepared to make our state and the everyday workings of our government more understandable to its citizens. As your representatives, this is both our responsibility and our pleasure.

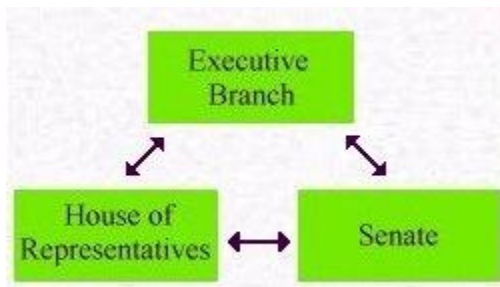
Part One

A Formidable Responsibility

Imagine studying thousands of subjects and developing an informed opinion about each one. That is exactly what legislators in the Pennsylvania General Assembly do every term as they consider and vote on proposals that may become law for all Pennsylvania citizens. State representatives and senators perform other services for those who elect them to office, but none are more important than lawmaking.

There are many steps in the legislative process and it can look complex on the surface. Actually, the sequence of turning a good idea into law is quite straightforward, moving in deliberate steps, but at a cautious pace. The founders of our state planned it that way. As former subjects of a king, they knew that a fair society is impossible when a single group or individual can act without restraint to make law for everyone else. They were determined that no one would have the power to create law alone or on impulse and they filled the Pennsylvania Constitution with safeguards to prevent it. Thanks to the vision of our first legislators, making law in Pennsylvania today requires responsible collaboration by many individuals -- elected to represent the interests of thousands more.

A Balance of Power



.....General Assembly.....

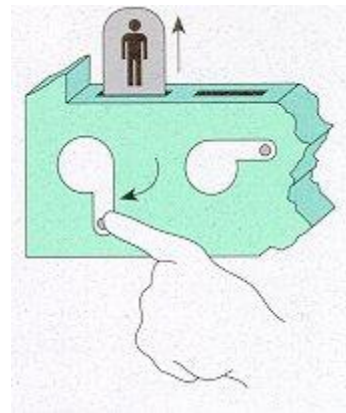
The Pennsylvania Constitution placed a fundamental check on legislative power by creating two bodies which must cooperate to make the law -- the House of Representatives and the Senate. Together, they form the General Assembly, with 50 legislators in the Senate and 203 Representatives in the House.

Each body must approve the lawmaking actions of the other -- or else work out compromises through *amendments* to proposed laws. Even then, the General Assembly can enact law only with the participation of the Governor, who heads the Executive Branch. The Governor can reject a proposed law by using a veto, however the General Assembly can override the veto if it has enough votes. In this way, power is evenly distributed, or balanced, between the House and the Senate and between the General Assembly and the Executive Branch. These constitutional safeguards are some of the famous "checks and balances" you probably first learned about in school.

Amendments
Changes to specific portions of a proposed law.
Amendments may be offered in committees or on the House Floor.

Who's the Boss?

You are. Along with every Pennsylvanian represented by a legislator. According to the Constitution, the people of Pennsylvania select representatives and senators to act on our behalf with the condition that they answer directly to the citizens who elected them. That happens in the voting booth. Exercising control through our votes is another check on runaway power. Legislators must earn our approval while in office -- two-year terms for representatives, four years for state senators. During that period, we expect them to represent our best interests every time they consider a proposed law. How well legislators meet our expectations determines whether they remain in office at the end of their terms or are replaced by candidates who voters believe will do a better job.



Part Two

Biography of a Bill

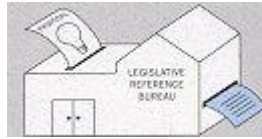


The unit of lawmaking is the "bill." A bill is the written version of an idea which legislators consider as a new law or a change to an existing law. From its first appearance in print, every House or Senate bill travels the same precarious course to the moment it becomes law -- or goes down to the agony of defeat. On the next few pages, we'll examine that course and its optional twists and turns, as we follow the life cycle of fictional House Bill 652.

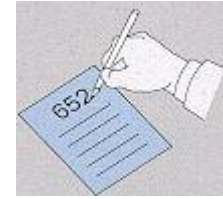
(for more detail on any of the individual steps in the process, simply click on the blue number of the respective step, or choose from the list at the bottom of this page).



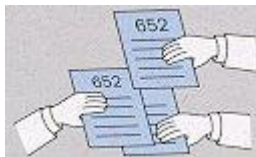
1. Birth of a Bill - The idea for Bill 652 came from a group of Pennsylvania legislators committed to environmental issues.



Legal experts at the Legislative Reference Bureau write the proposal in the proper form for a bill.



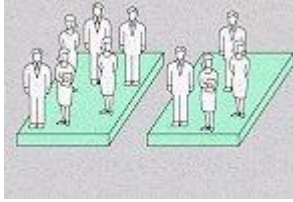
The Chief Clerk names the new proposal by assigning it a number.



2. Development - The Speaker assigns the bill to a Standing Committee. At the same time, the new bill is copied and distributed to House members and made available to the public.



3. Rites of Passage - House Bill 652 is examined by the Standing Committee on Conservation which votes to accept it as written and reports it to the House Floor. But first, the topic takes a brief detour into the caucus room for a second round of review.



4. Peer Review - Majority and minority party members meet in separate caucus rooms. There, they review the content of House Bill 652 and decide whether to support or oppose it, as well as other bills scheduled for discussion on the House Floor.



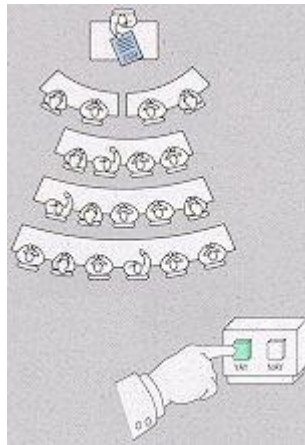
5. Entering a Wider World - Like all bills, 652 is considered by members on the House Floor on three separate days.



The First Day of Consideration - Bill 652 debuts on the House Floor with an announcement by the clerk from the podium that the bill has been reported from committee. Members begin to inform themselves about the bill.

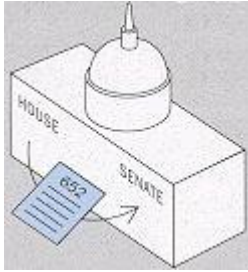


The Second Day of Consideration - The number and title of Bill 652 are again read to the members, who continue to prepare for discussion of the bill.

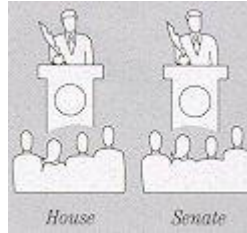


Third Day of Consideration -

Members actively debate House Bill 652. Ultimately, they vote for its passage.



6. Leaving the Nest - House Bill 652 moves to the Senate where it is examined in committee, in caucus and by members on the Senate Floor. The Senate passes the bill without amendments.



The Speaker of the House signs House Bill 652 on the House Floor and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate signs it in the Senate.



7. The Final Interview - The bill arrives on the Governor's desk where the Governor signs it into law.



8. Joining the Team - House Bill 652 officially becomes law and is given an Act number.

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
House of Representatives

Copies of this booklet may be obtained from your State Representative

or from

The Office of the Chief Clerk
House of Representatives
Room 129, Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0028

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