

# How a Bill becomes a Law in New York State

## **STEP 1: THE IDEA**

The idea for a bill can come from several sources: legislators and their staffs, the governor and his staff or departments (program bills), individuals, lobbyists and interest groups, or it could be a bill from a previous session that failed to become a law.

## **STEP 2: SPONSORSHIP**

A bill must have a sponsor in order to be introduced. Legislators, the Governor and the Attorney General can sponsor legislation, When the idea for a bill originates outside of these parties, then a sponsor must be found. For example, a lobbyist with an idea for a bill must circulate it among legislators in order to find a sponsor.

## **STEP 3: BILL DRAFTING**

The legislative sponsor submits the concept for a bill, sometimes with desired language, to the LBDC. LBDC's Legal Services Unit drafts the bill, making sure that it is in the proper form and that the content reflects the sponsor's intentions. The LBDC assigns a number for internal tracking purposes and returns the bill draft to the sponsor. The prime sponsor may circulate the bill draft among colleagues in order to find additional sponsors.

## **STEP 4: INTRODUCTION**

The bill draft is presented to the Index Office where it is assigned a bill number and printed. Once a bill has been introduced, the LBDC makes information about the bill — bill text, summary, sponsor's memo, etc. — available on LRS. The journal clerk of each house makes hard copies of bills available to anyone who wants them at their respective document rooms on the third floor of the Capitol.

## **STEP 5: COMMITTEE ACTIONS**

Once a bill is introduced, house leadership refers it to the appropriate committees for review, discussion, revision (see Step 5A) and ultimately, approval or disapproval. The staffs of the standing committees in each house evaluate the ramifications of a bill and decide whether it should be approved with or without revisions. Committee agendas as well as committee actions can be accessed on LRS.

### **STEP 5A: REVISION**

As a bill makes its way through one or more committees, committees may want changes. When a bill changes, it is called an amendment. Each time a bill is amended, it must go back through the Legislative Bill Drafting Commission where it is proofread and the appropriate form and content maintained. A bill can be amended an unlimited number of times by each committee through which it must pass. Amendments are indicated by a letter after the bill number. S.180-A, for example, indicates the first amendment to Senate Bill 180; S.180-D would be the fourth amendment and the fifth version of that bill; etc. If a bill makes it through all of the appropriate committees, then it is "reported out" to the floor of the house for a vote. If a committee does not report out a bill to the floor, then it is said to have "died" in committee.

### **STEP 5B: SENATE FINANCE — ASSEMBLY WAYS & MEANS**

Any bill that requires an expenditure of state funds must go to the Assembly Ways & Means Committee or the Senate Finance Committee.

### **STEP 5C: THE RULES COMMITTEE(S)**

The Majority Leader of the Senate is the chair of the Senate Rules Committee and the Assembly Speaker chairs the Assembly Rules Committee. Therefore, these committees play a significant role in the flow of legislation. They are especially influential near the end of a legislative session when all bills get referred to Rules.

### **STEP 6: FLOOR VOTE**

A bill that is reported out of each committee to which it was assigned in a particular house is put to a floor vote before the entire house. If a bill passes the floor vote in the first house and passes the floor vote in the other house where it also has been scrutinized in committee(s), then it will be sent to the Governor (see Step 7). Failure to pass a floor vote in either house means the bill will not go to the Governor. Generally, it is prior to a floor vote that a bill is debated before the entire house. The public can observe floor debates from the gallery overlooking each chamber. Floor calendars can be accessed on LRS.

### **STEP 7: THE GOVERNOR**

When a bill has passed both houses, it is delivered to the Governor. The Governor may approve of a bill and sign it, or he may disapprove and veto the bill. The Governor's approval and veto messages can be seen on LRS.

#### **STEP 7A: VETO**

If the Governor vetoes a bill, he stops it from becoming law. Often, a bill that was vetoed or otherwise failed to become a law will be reintroduced in a subsequent session. A Governor's veto can be overridden by a two-thirds majority vote in each house.

### **STEP 8: A BILL BECOMES A LAW**

A bill becomes a law when the governor signs it. As bills become laws, they are assigned chapter numbers for the particular session in which they were passed (such as, Chapter 17 of the Laws of 1995), known as "session chapters." "Session Chapters" should not be confused with "chapters" as that term applies to consolidated law. Most New York State laws are organized or consolidated into subject areas called chapters such as Labor and Insurance. Currently, there are approximately 90 chapters of consolidated law in New York State.

Laws that do not fit within any of the consolidated law chapters such as the Local Emergency Housing Rent Control Act of 1962 are called unconsolidated laws.