

How a Bill Becomes a Law in New Hampshire

Adapted from the New Hampshire Almanac*

An idea for change or improvement in the laws of New Hampshire must first be drafted into a bill in proper form and language. A bill is proposed legislation under consideration by a legislature. Private citizens, interest groups, head of state agencies, and even the Governor must first find a sponsor in the legislative body to submit an [Legislative Service Request](#) (LSR). An LSR is a filing made by a legislator for a proposed bill and submitted to the [Office of Legislative Services](#) to have a bill drafted. It is then assigned a bill docket number. Draft bills come from the 400 elected members of the [New Hampshire House of Representatives](#) and the 24 members of the [New Hampshire Senate](#). All drafted bills must be approved and signed by the sponsoring legislator. All co-sponsors must also approve and sign the drafted bill.



*New Hampshire State House Dome.
Photograph from the NH General Court website.*

How the Bill is Presented to the Legislature



*Inside the House of Representatives Chambers
Photograph from the NH General Court website.*



*Inside the Senate Chambers
Photograph from the NH General Court website.*

The originating drafted Senate Bill (SB) or House Bill (HB) is first given to the [Senate Clerk's Office](#) or the [House Clerk's Office](#) (to whichever body the sponsor belongs). The bill is introduced when the House or Senate adopts a motion referring to bills by number only, in accordance with the list in the possession of the Clerk. The bill is read twice in the early session. It is then assigned to a committee and sent to be printed. The President of the Senate or the Speaker of the House assigns the bill to a standing committee. The choice of this committee is made on the basis of subject matter, as outlined in Rules of the House covering the jurisdictions of the standing committees. The New Hampshire Constitution provides that all money bills (those imposing new means to raise money) must originate in the House, but the Senate may propose, or concur with, amendments, as on other bills.

Standing Committees

Standing committees for the [House](#) and [Senate](#) are appointed by the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate respectively. Appointments to committees are made by the President or Speaker, with the advice of the minority party floor leader.

The Bill and Committee Hearings

Every bill introduced and referred to a committee must have a public hearing unless the rules are suspended by two-thirds of the members present. New Hampshire is one of the few states requiring a public hearing on all bills.

Testimony at and Conduct of Committee Hearings

The Committee Chair announces the number and title of the bill at the beginning of the hearing. People wishing to testify before the committee are required to rise, address the Chairman, give their names, addresses and, if appearing as a lobbyist, state such to the Clerk. Those in favor of the bill and those against the bill alternate in speaking at all hearings. Those wishing to speak leave their names with the Committee Clerk and are called in order.

The Chair has the duty to call to order a speaker not keeping remarks to the point. The purpose of a public hearing is to give testimony and information, not to argue or inquire. The length of time allowed any one speaker may be limited by the committee. If a citizen cannot be present at a hearing a written statement may be submitted to the Clerk of the committee. Only committee members may ask questions of the speaker. Speakers may not ask questions of the committee or other speakers. Anyone may submit amendments to a bill. It is advisable that on any such amendment, pertinent information or testimony should be duplicated so that all committee members will have a copy. When all persons have been heard, the Chair declares the public hearing closed. If the Chair determines that the committee needs more information or the bill needs additional amendments, he or she may schedule a work session for the full committee or a subcommittee.

The Bill and Committee Deliberation

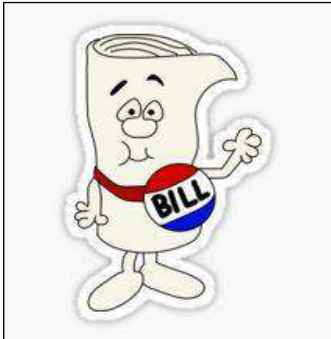
Committee deliberation and decision is conducted in executive session. A majority must be present in order to take action. The public may observe committees in executive session as they take their final vote on a bill. A report is submitted to the Clerk of the Senate or House entitled: Ought to Pass (OTP), Ought to Pass with Amendment (OTPA), Inexpedient to Legislate (ITL), Re-Refer to Committee, or Refer to Interim Study.

- OTP: A recommendation by the committee indicating that the committee supports the bill.
- OTPA: A recommendation by the committee indicating that the committee supports the bill with an amendment(s).
- ITL: A recommendation by the committee indicating that the committee is against the bill.
- Re-Refer to Committee: A committee report only in the first-year session.
- Refer to Interim Study: A committee report only in the second-year session.

The Bill on the Floor of the House or Senate

All bills may be acted upon the day after the committee report appears in the [House](#) or [Senate calendars](#). Any amendments proposed by the committee which make material changes in the original bill must be printed in the calendar.

Action on bills is taken on the second reading on the floor of the House or Senate. Debate, if any, is held and amendments are made at this time. A bill is considered killed when the House or Senate votes to adopt the committee report of "Inexpedient to legislate," or when a motion from the floor to "Indefinitely postpone" is adopted. After a bill has passed the body of the Legislature in which it originated, it is sent on to the other body where it goes through similar procedures, except for bills containing an appropriation.



"I'm Just a Bill"
From a School House Rock! segment, 1976.

Bills Appropriating Money

Appropriation Bills are proposed laws that authorize the expenditure of government funds. These are sent to the [House Finance Committee](#), or to the [Senate Finance Committee](#), either as an initial step or after favorable floor action on bills sent to other committees.

Amended Bills

Every bill must be passed in identical form by each both the House and the Senate before it is sent to the Governor. If a bill has been amended by the non-originating body, it is sent back to the originating body for concurrence. At this point, there are three options:

- The originating body concurs, or agrees, and the bill is sent to the Governor.
- The originating body non-concurs, or does not agree, and requests a [Committee of Conference](#) (COC) between the two bodies. In this case, the Speaker of the House or Senate President normally appoints a conference committee of members of both houses to work out a compromise.
- The originating body does not concur, no COC is requested, and the bill dies.

All reports of conference committees must be distributed to the members of each body before action can be taken. The originating body acts first on a conference committee report.

Enrolled Bills

When a bill has passed both the House and the Senate, it is sent to the [Committee on Rules and Enrolled Bills](#) for the purpose of enrolling. This committee carefully examines the bill for clerical errors or formal imperfections. In case of such errors, it reports them back to both houses for amendment in those particulars only.

Once the bill is signed by the Speaker of the House or Senate President, the bill is forwarded to the Secretary of State who transmits it to the Governor. It may be recalled from the Governor any time before it is acted upon, by a majority vote of the Senate or House, whichever last had possession.

The Final Acceptance or Rejection of a Bill

If the legislature has not adjourned, the Governor has five days in which to sign the bill, veto the bill, or allow the measure to pass without signature. When the bill is signed, it becomes law. If it is neither signed nor vetoed, it becomes law without signature.

If the bill is vetoed, it returns to the body where it originated. This veto can be overturned with a two-thirds majority vote in each body. It then becomes law without the Governor's signature. Without the two-thirds affirmative vote in both bodies, the veto is upheld.

If the Legislature has adjourned, the Governor has five days (excluding Sundays and holidays) in which to sign the bill. A bill will die or become a "pocket veto" if it is not signed. Each bill carries in its final paragraphs the specific date that it is to go into effect.



*Governor Sununu Signing a Bill Into Law
From www.governor.nh.gov*

How to Find the Bill Language in Statute (Law)

Most bills modify or add language to existing statutes, and the bill text will identify either the new statute number or the existing statute section(s) being modified. To see the revised law in its entirety once it is effective, find the appropriate Revised Statutes Annotated (RSA) number in the [online list of statutes](#).

*Source: The New Hampshire Almanac is compiled by the [New Hampshire State Library](#) from state statutes and other sources as noted.