

Welcome to the

SENATE *of* *Pennsylvania*



About Pennsylvania



Harrisburg has been the capital of Pennsylvania since 1812. The main building of the original Capitol, pictured here, was destroyed by fire in 1897.

HISTORY OF THE STATE CAPITOL

The first capital of Pennsylvania – the headquarters of Pennsylvania’s government – was established at Tinicum Island, on the Delaware River in Bucks County, in 1643, when Pennsylvania was still a Colony.

In the following years, the capital was moved to Philadelphia and Lancaster before being permanently established in Harrisburg in 1812. A building was constructed and the General Assembly first assembled there on January 2, 1821.

THE CAPITOL BUILDING

The main building of the original Capitol was destroyed by fire on February 2, 1897. Two months later, the General Assembly authorized the construction of the present main Capitol building, which was dedicated by President Theodore Roosevelt on October 4, 1906.

The building was designed by Philadelphia architect Joseph M. Huston to reflect the architecture of the Italian Renaissance. An East Wing addition was constructed in 1987 to alleviate space problems.

The five-story Capitol, with its Vermont granite exterior, contains 475 rooms and covers two acres of ground. At the center is its landmark dome, 272 feet in height, topped by a symbolic figure of the Commonwealth holding a garlanded mace.

The Capitol’s interior is finished in marble, mahogany, bronze and tile. Its corridors are adorned with gold leaf fixtures and paintings from renowned artists. The interior of the dome is a popular attraction for Capitol visitors, who are drawn to its breathtaking detail.

THE STATE SEAL

The State Seal is stamped onto official Commonwealth documents to certify their authenticity. When Pennsylvania was still a province of England, its seals were those of William Penn and his descendants. By 1778, a seal similar to the present one was in use.



The seal includes obverse and reverse faces, although the obverse face is most commonly used. It contains a shield emblazoned with a sailing ship, a plow and sheaves of wheat. Surrounding the shield are a stalk of Indian corn, an olive branch and the inscription, “Seal of the State of Pennsylvania.”

The reverse face shows a woman – representing liberty – trampling upon a lion – representing tyranny. The design is encircled by the words, “Both Can’t Survive.”



THE COAT OF ARMS

Pennsylvania’s Coat of Arms is a symbol of the Commonwealth and can be found on many documents and publications. An early version first appeared on state paper money issued in 1777; a revised design today adorns the state flag. The coat of arms was originally designed by Caleb Lowmes of Philadelphia more than 200 years ago. The Legislature changed it several times before settling on the current design – similar to Lowmes’ original – made up of a shield in the center, supported by two horses. On the shield are the emblems of the State Seal – a ship, plow, sheaves of wheat, an olive branch and cornstalk. At the bottom is the motto “Virtue, Liberty and Independence.”

The Pennsylvania General Assembly

BASIC INFORMATION

ABOUT THE LEGISLATURE

The Legislature enacts laws, levies taxes and determines how the funds from such taxes will be spent. The state appropriates money to support schools, hospitals, senior citizens and the poor; to build and maintain roads and bridges; and to fund the general cost of running state government.

The Pennsylvania Legislature is made up of two elected bodies, or chambers – the Senate, with 50 members, and the House of Representatives, with 203 members. Both chambers must approve a bill before it can be sent to the Governor, who can either sign it into law or reject it through the use of veto power.

The Senate alone also has the authority to approve or reject certain nominations made by the Governor to boards, commissions, judgeships, etc.

The Senate Chamber is located in the Capitol's north wing and the House Chamber is in the south wing.

The Lieutenant Governor, who is second-in-command in state government to the Governor, also serves as President of the Senate, opening and closing the day's activities, announcing bills up for vote and enforcing Senate rules. In the occasion of a tie on certain issues, the Lieutenant Governor casts a Senate vote. In the absence of the Lieutenant Governor, the President Pro Tempore – elected to the post by fellow Senators – presides.

The House is presided over by the Speaker, a member of the House who is elected to the position by House colleagues.

SESSIONS OF THE LEGISLATURE

Regular sessions begin on the first Tuesday in January in each odd year and continue for two years until the Legislature formally recesses in a process called "sine die." Senate sessions are usually held on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.

There is no restriction on the subject matter of legislation that may be considered in regular session.

Special sessions are called by proclamation by the Governor or by petition of a majority of members in the House and Senate. Only subjects mentioned in the proclamation can be considered in a special session.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE LEGISLATURE

Each Senatorial District contains an average of 245,621 people; each House District an average of 60,498 people.

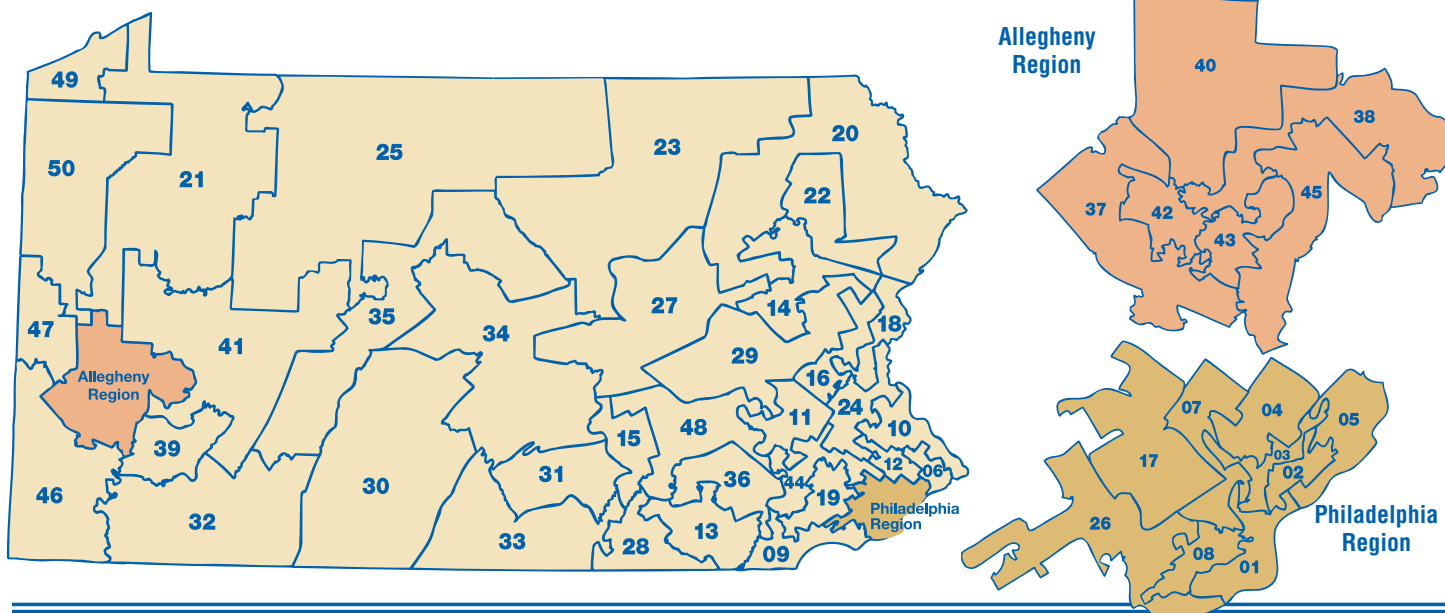
SENATE STAFF

To assist Senators in their lawmaking and constituent duties each Senator employs a staff of secretaries and administrative aides.

Staff members work with the Senator to answer constituent phone calls and letters; process requests and

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The State Senatorial Districts



applications for state government services; research issues that will come before the Senate or committees on which the Senator serves; provide information on the activities of state agencies and departments; and coordinate activities in the Senator's Capitol and district offices.

LEGISLATIVE TOOLS

There are several reference materials available to Senators and the general public to help track the thousands of pieces of legislation introduced each session.

Daily Calendar – Placed on the desk of each member every day the Senate is in session, the calendar lists all the bills or executive nominations before the Senate that day.

Legislative History – A limited number of copies are printed each week and delivered to each Senator's office and filed on the Senate floor. The history shows every bill and resolution introduced in the House and Senate, action taken, and the status of the legislation as it makes its way through the legislative process.

It also lists bills approved or vetoed by the Governor, committee action, and other information. A final legislative history is published at the end of each session ending in an even-numbered year.

Legislative Journal – A Senate and House journal is prepared daily recording all action and votes taken plus other pertinent information. These are printed for members and distributed to libraries throughout the Commonwealth.

The Senator's Job

During any two-year legislative session, a Senator will consider hundreds of bills, take votes on the Senate floor, consider the passage of new laws, attend hundreds of meetings on government issues, assist in the development of state budgets, and reply to constituent letters, phone calls and inquiries. These varied and diverse responsibilities fall under a Senator's three basic roles: lawmaker, supervisor of government operations, and constituent representative.

As a lawmaker, a Senator proposes new laws or changes to existing laws. As a government supervisor, the legislator oversees the executive branch of government and its multi-billion dollar budget. As a constituent representative, a Senator acts as a liaison between district constituents and state government bureaucracy.

These three roles are played out in various ways throughout any given day, as explained below.

LAWMAKER

- Works with staff members to research the issues involved in a bill the Senator will introduce or legislate on which the Senator will vote.
- Develops support for, or opposition to, legislation through meetings, telephone calls and written correspondence.
- Attends caucus meetings and hearings to become informed on issues coming before the Senate.

- Serves as a member of various standing committees.
- Attends Senate sessions, takes part in debate, and votes on business before the Senate.

GOVERNMENT SUPERVISOR

- Uses committee meetings, constituent input and department reports to monitor the operation of state government departments.
- Oversees development of Pennsylvania government's annual budget.
- Reviews all individuals nominated by the Governor for executive appointments to state boards, commissions and departments for which Senate approval is required.

CONSTITUENT REPRESENTATIVE

- Meets with constituents, fellow legislators and others who request that the Senator introduce, support or oppose legislation.
- Replies to correspondence and telephone calls from constituents.
- Keeps constituents informed on pending legislation through newsletters, television shows, and other outlets, and requests that district residents share their views on issues through surveys.
- Represents the Commonwealth or legislative district at ceremonial state or local functions.
- Works to resolve constituent disputes and other local problems.

The Lawmaking Process

PROPOSING LEGISLATION

Proposed new laws are known as “bills” until they are enacted – i.e., until they pass both chambers and become law. Any bill may begin in either the House or Senate – except bills raising revenue, which must originate in the House.

In an effort to provide adequate consideration of legislation, the state Constitution requires that a bill must be considered on three separate days in each chamber.

THE COMMITTEE SYSTEM

Much of the Senate’s important work is done in committees. When a bill is introduced, it is printed for legislators and the public to view, and referred to the appropriate legislative committee. For example, a bill that would affect public schools would ordinarily be referred to the Education Committee.

There are 21 permanent – or standing – committees in the Senate. The committees may be broken into sub-committees by the chairman to handle more complex legislation.

The President Pro Tempore appoints the chairman, vice chairman and members of each Senate committee as well as any special or temporary committee the Senate authorizes. Though the amount of time a Senator has served in the Senate is considered when the President Pro Tempore makes committee assignments, a Senator often requests to serve on committees that reflect the Senator’s interests or interests in the district.

A majority of committee members – a quorum – must be present to conduct a meeting. All meetings are open to the public. However, on rare occasions, the committee may conduct some business in private – or executive – session.

HEARINGS ON BILLS

In addition to voting on legislation, committees can hold public hearings on a bill or package of bills to gain input from the public and interested parties. A committee member, or anyone interested in the legislation, may ask the chairman to hold hearings. Persons known to be for or against a bill or who are recognized experts representing groups affected by the legislation are usually notified of the hearings so they may testify.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Committees are not required to approve – or “report out” – legislation. One of the chief functions of committees is to screen out undesirable or unnecessary bills before they reach the full Senate. However, the arbitrary refusal of a committee to report a bill can be remedied by a motion to discharge the committee from further consideration of the bill. Such a motion requires a majority vote of 26 in the Senate and cannot be made until after the committee has had the bill for 10 legislative days.

If the motion carries, the bill goes to the full Senate for consideration.

PRINTER'S NO. 88	
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA	
SENATE BILL	
No. 116	Session of 20XX
INTRODUCED BY M. WHITE, MUSTO, GORDNER, PILEGGI, D. WHITE, RAFFERTY, VANCE, ERICKSON, ROBBINS, BROWNE, EARLL, ORIE, WAUGH AND BAKER, JANUARY 29, 20XX	
REFERRED TO ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES AND ENERGY, JANUARY 29, 20XX	
AN ACT	
1	Providing for environmental funds reporting and disclosure by
2	the Department of Environmental Protection.
3	The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
4	hereby enacts as follows:
5	Section 1. Short title.
6	This act shall be known and may be cited as the Environmental
7	Funds Reporting and Disclosure Act.
8	Section 2. Department responsibilities.
9	The Department of Environmental Protection shall do all of
10	the following:
11	(1) No later than September 30, 2009, and each year
12	thereafter, compile and update a comprehensive report of all
13	special funds and restricted revenue accounts administered by
14	the Department of Environmental Protection, containing at a
15	minimum:
16	(i) the total receipts and expenditures of each
17	fund, including all fees, fines, penalties and natural

LEGISLATION ENACTED

In most cases, a bill becomes law after it is approved on three different occasions in the House and Senate and signed by the Governor. However, a bill can also become law on its own if the Governor fails to sign or veto the measure within 10 days of receiving it.

If the Governor vetoes a bill, it is returned to the General Assembly along with a letter stating the Governor’s objections to it. However, a bill may be enacted over the Governor’s veto with the approval of two-thirds of the members of each chamber.

How a Bill Becomes a Law

The first step in lawmaking is for a Senator or a member of the House of Representatives to submit his or her ideas in writing to the Legislative Reference Bureau – the bill-writing agency of the Legislature – outlining what the legislator is seeking through the proposed law. The bill is then drafted (written) and typed in proper legal form.

BILL INTRODUCTION

A Senator introduces the bill by filing it with the Secretary of the Senate. The title is then read by a clerk during legislative session and the bill is referred to an appropriate standing committee by the Senate President Pro Tempore.

SENATE COMMITTEE

The bill may then be considered by the committee or referred by the chairman to a subcommittee with instructions to study it and make recommendations to the full committee. Consideration of the bill could also include input from the public through subcommittee or committee hearings.

The committee may then vote to report the bill to the Senate floor, either as committed (which means without change), as amended (with changes), or, in rare instances, with a negative recommendation. The committee may also decide not to report the bill at all.

THE FULL SENATE

The measure then goes to the full Senate for the first of three days of consideration. No debate or amendments are permitted from the floor at this stage.

On second consideration, Senators may propose amendments, if they are deemed relevant to the subject of the bill. Debate is permitted at this stage. Once agreed to by the Senate for a second time, the bill is reprinted to include any amendments.

On third consideration, a bill may again be amended. At the conclusion of debate, a roll call is held. If a constitutional majority – usually 26 Senators – vote in its favor, the bill passes the Senate. (With some special bills, the Constitution requires a larger majority – two-thirds of the membership in each chamber.)

HOUSE COMMITTEE

After the bill has passed the Senate, it is sent to the House of Representatives, where the Speaker refers it to the appropriate standing committee in the House.

THE FULL HOUSE

If the bill is reported from committee it follows a course similar to that in the Senate, except on first consideration. After first consideration in the House, the bill is not automatically moved on to second consideration, but is laid on the table. It may be removed from the table by a motion of the Majority Leader, or a designee.

When a bill is so removed from the table, it is placed on the legislative calendar for the next day.

Second and third consideration and final passage in the House is similar to the Senate, with 102 votes generally being the constitutional majority in the House.

SENATE RECONSIDERS

If the House amends a Senate bill, the bill is returned to the Senate to consider the changes. A constitutional majority is needed to concur with the amendments. The Senate may amend a House bill in the same manner. Either chamber may defeat a bill originating from the other, either in committee or on the floor.

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

If the Senate refuses to agree to the amendments made by the House, or vice versa, the bill usually goes to a Conference Committee made up of three members of each chamber. The Conference Committee attempts to resolve the differences between the two versions of the bill and its members report to their respective chambers. The Senate and House each hold a vote on whether to accept the committee report. If approved by Senate and House, the bill is then sent to the Governor for consideration.

THE GOVERNOR

The Governor, after referring the bill to the Attorney General to certify its legality and constitutionality, can either sign, veto, or take no action on the legislation.

PRINTING AN ACT

The official certified copy of each bill approved by the Governor is placed in the custody of the Secretary of the Commonwealth, given an act number, and filed. It is then no longer considered a bill, but an "Act of the General Assembly."

If the Governor does not act on the bill within a prescribed time, it becomes law without his signature.

The Legislative Reference Bureau – where the bill originated – prepares the act for printing. The Bureau, with the approval of legislative leaders and the Attorney General, may correct editorial errors or make other small changes that do not change the substance of the act.

The Bureau then publishes the act along with others from that year in book form, known as the Pamphlet Laws, for distribution to courts, attorneys, libraries and citizens who may request them.

