How A Bill Becomes Law

More than 20,000 pieces of legislation are introduced in each Congress. Only about 5,000 pass out of committee and fewer than 1,000 eventually become law.

**Introduction of a Bill**

Ideas for bills come from private citizens, special interest groups, the president, or executive branch officials. Only a member of Congress can introduce a bill in either house.

Bill receives its first reading.

**Committee Action**

The House parliamentarian (on behalf of the speaker) and the Senate parliamentarian (on behalf of the president of the Senate) refer bills to the appropriate committee.

Committee chairperson may refer bill to a subcommittee.

Under the guidance of chairperson, the committee can ignore the bill and let it die in committee (pigeonholing) or can kill bill by a majority vote.

Committee can vote to recommend adoption of bill with possible amendments.

Extra step for the House

Rules Committee may chart the course the bill will take in floor action.

**Floor Action**

Once the bill is reported out of committee, it is debated in the chamber where it was introduced.

During floor debate a bill receives its second reading.

Floor debate allows for amendments to be added.

After debate, the bill is printed in its new form with any added amendments.

A majority of members (quorum) must be present for a vote.

**Conference Committee Version**

If the House and Senate versions vary, a conference committee discusses the differences and comes up with a compromise version.

Compromise version is sent to both houses for third reading and final vote.

**Presidential Action**

Congress can override a presidential veto with 2/3 of both houses approving.

If the president signs the bill, it becomes law.

If the president fails to sign a bill within 10 days while Congress is in session, the bill becomes law.

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