

How a Bill Becomes a Law in Delaware

Background on Delaware's Legislature

Delaware's General Assembly is considered a part-time legislature with session beginning on the second Tuesday in January and ending June 30th with several breaks in between for budget mark up and spring break.

Delaware's General Assembly is divided into two houses, the State Senate (the upper house) and the House of Representatives (the lower house). Delaware's legislature is comprised of 21 Senators and 41 Representatives. Typically, Delaware's Senators serve four-year terms and House Representatives serve two-year terms.

The General Assembly is made up of several committees charged with the task of thoroughly addressing any and all concerns regarding legislation (for example; Natural Resources Committee, Education Committee, Ethics Committee, etc.). These committees then vote whether or not a particular piece of legislation goes to the floor for a vote. Upon entering Legislative Hall (don't forget to bring ID!), the right side of the building is the Senate and the left side is the House of Representatives. In each chamber the majority party is seated on the side of the aisle closest to the windows, while the minority occupies the side of the aisle furthest from the windows. The Division of Research is located in the basement across from the Joint and Finance Hearing Rooms

and contains copies of every bill. While at Legislative Hall you will hear a series of bells that remind legislators to get onto the floor for session. The bells begin fifteen minutes prior to sessions. One bell designates the Senate, while two bells designate the House.

A Note on Other Decision Makers

State Legislators aren't your only elected officials! In addition to our legislators, we are represented by our Congressional delegation (two Senators and a Member of Congress), our Governor, Lieutenant Governor and their appointed cabinet, County Council or Commissioners, and, in some cases, local government representatives in your town. These elected officials also play a very important role in many of the decisions made in Delaware.

Where and How to Find Your Elected Officials' Information

If you aren't sure who your elected officials are, or how to find their contact information, no problem! Delaware makes it very easy to find this information at their "one-stop shop" voter information website, www.ivote.de.gov. Here, you can find out if you are registered to vote, who represents you on every level of government from President down to local elected office, and the website even provides contact information for these



officials. If you have any trouble finding the information you need, simply contact us (our information can be found on page 23) and we can assist.

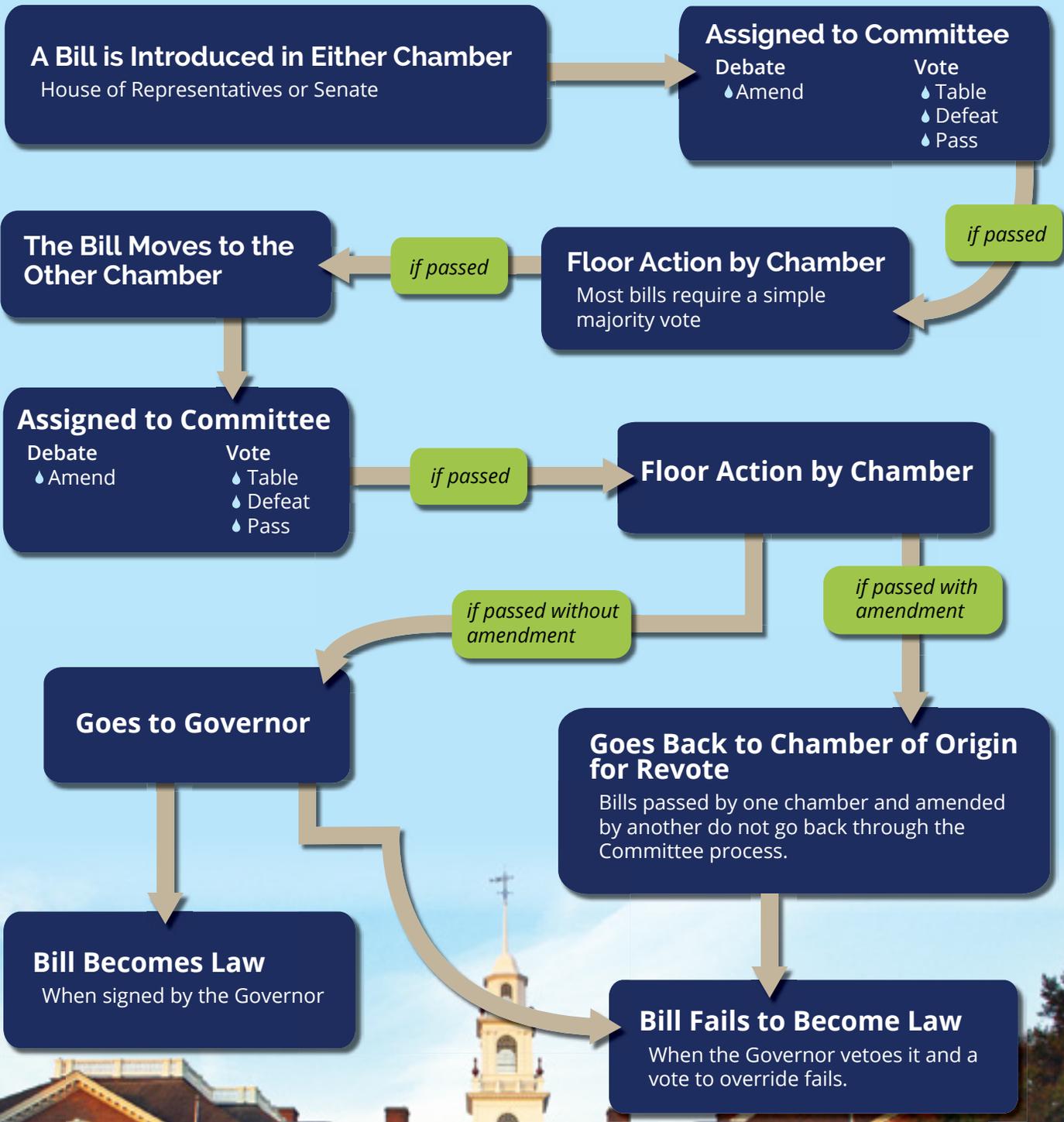
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When a legislator has an idea for a bill, they draft the language for the bill and circulate it among their fellow legislators for sponsorship or co-sponsorship. Typically, a bill has a Senate and House sponsor and/or co-sponsor. Once sponsorship is secured, the bill has its first reading in the house where the bill originated. Here, the bill is assigned to a committee. The chairperson of that committee then decides when the bill should be assigned a committee hearing. A committee hearing is an opportunity for the public to testify or express their opinion on the bill. It is one of the only times the public is invited to offer comment on legislation.

This campaign's citizen advocates often follow several committees closely, including the House and Senate Natural Resources, House and Senate Agriculture, and House and Senate Energy Committees. In order for a committee to vote they must have four members or a majority present in order to constitute a quorum. To learn more about pieces of legislation and the Committees, visit the Delaware General Assembly website at <http://legis.delaware.gov>.

If you'd like to track a bill, listen to live sessions, find out about bills that were recently introduced, or find out what bills will be studied in an upcoming committee, visit <http://legis.delaware.gov>.

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Become a Water Warrior in Legislative Hall

Elected officials want to hear from you, their constituents, on issues that you care about. There are many ways to contact an elected official: writing a letter/sending an email, placing a telephone call, asking for an in-person meeting or even contacting them on social media like Facebook or Twitter.

Tips for Engaging Elected Officials

Now that you know who your elected officials are and how to contact them, here are some tips on the best ways to connect with them!

Identify yourself. Start by telling your elected official who you are. Make sure to tell them where you live so they know you're a constituent. (Typically, you only contact your own legislators, unless it's a special circumstance such as a committee chairman.)

Be polite and professional. This is common sense, but always worth repeating. You can state your views firmly and forcefully without being hostile or argumentative. Always be friendly and courteous, even if the legislator disagrees with your position. Don't interrupt at legislative hearings. Always say thank you and if meeting in person, dress neatly and professionally.

State a clear and concise objective. Stay focused on the purpose of your phone call or meeting, and don't wander off in too many directions. Let them know up front what you

are asking for. For example, state, "I am asking Senator Smith to support additional funding for clean water initiatives like green infrastructure, wetland restoration, and updates to aging sewer systems."

Explain why this issue is important to you personally. Lawmakers are interested in data and statistics, but they're much more interested in how an issue affects their constituents personally. In this case, you might want to underscore how often you enjoy fishing, swimming, or even detail how the road in front of your house constantly floods and it's affected the value of your home. Tell your water story.

Don't use form letters and social media posts. Legislators want to know what you have to say, not just that you can cut- and-paste. They recognize a form letter. It's okay to use talking points and language from this guide, but it's best to put them into your own words. Please personalize the sample letters and social media posts used in this guide.

Use the web and email effectively. Visit legislators' official web sites before your meetings, so you can learn in advance about their background, biographical information, positions on issues, and even their pets. Elected officials receive many emails so if you do send an email, it's a good idea to follow up with a phone call, too.

Never lie or mislead. Don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer to a question, and offer to get back to them later with the answer or put them in touch with someone who might know. You're not expected to be an expert on every issue—you are a citizen who cares and has an opinion.

Work with legislative staff. Don't be offended if you can't speak with the legislator on the phone or meet with him or her personally. Lawmakers rely on their staff to meet with constituents, draft legislation, learn the issues, and make policy recommendations. The staff will have more time to get to know you and your issues, and they are your gateway to the elected officials. Get to know the staff and develop relationships with them so they will begin to view you as a source of reliable information on clean water initiatives in Delaware.

Listen to elected officials' comments and questions. When discussing clean water issues, let elected officials react to the issues you raise, and have a conversation. Their comments and questions will give you cues on how to frame your arguments and what additional information might be useful. If they ask questions or need more information, it gives you an opportunity to follow up with them after your meeting. A two-way conversation is important when advocating for any issue.

Thank everyone who was helpful. Always thank a staff member who took the time to meet with you, and follow up with any additional information that's needed. If a legislator does what you've requested, such as co-sponsor or vote for a bill, be sure to thank him or her for taking that action. Positive reinforcement is the most effective way to develop a good relationship for future issues.



Sample Letter to Legislators

May 1, 2016

Senator First Name Last Name
411 Legislative Hall
Dover, DE 19901

Dear Senator Last Name,

As your constituent, I am reaching out to you regarding my concerns about Delaware's water quality. I support additional state funding being used for initiatives that would further improve our water.

The quality of our water is important to many aspects of our lives. Water affects public health, our environment and our economy. Perhaps most importantly, water affects my family and our everyday lives.

Some of my favorite activities include running the trails around the White Clay Creek, fishing downstate in the Inland Bays, and biking along the Brandywine. In fact, I'm just now beginning to take my children out on the trails so they can enjoy everything Delaware's outdoors has to offer, too. But, if we don't continue to invest in Delaware's water quality, I'll lose these recreational opportunities that are very important to me, and, frankly, our economy as well.

I hope you will consider sponsoring legislation that would drive more funding towards water quality programs across the state, and at the least, support any legislation that improves our water when it comes across your desk.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts on Delaware's water and am happy to provide further information or answer any questions you may have. Thank you for your time and consideration on this important matter.

Best Regards,

Danielle Smith

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