

## How we make laws

### Legislators introduce bills

First, legislators submit bills to the House or Senate. Leaders in those chambers choose which committees should receive them.

Bill introductions →



A bill may go through committee meetings, debates, changes, and votes. If both the House of Representatives and Senate pass it, the Governor decides whether to sign it into law. Below are the most common steps a bill will follow.

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**Prefile** (Filing a bill before session, opens first week of December): Members can file bills in the month before session begins. This is called “prefiling.”

Prefiled bills are officially introduced the first day of the session and are posted under *Bills, Common ways to search for bills, Prefiled bills*.

**First reading of a bill:** Normally, a bill is read the first time by title only in open session of the chamber. This is called the first reading.

**Assigning a bill to a committee:** Leaders in the House or Senate will decide which committee to refer a bill to. This usually relates to the bill’s subject.

**Budget-related bills:** Bills that affect the state budget must also go to a fiscal committee for review.

Each bill has a **bill page** showing sponsors, status, history, and available documents including fiscal notes. There are also links to Comment on the bill or get notifications regarding status.

### Committees review bills

Committees study bills and make reports on them. They also hold meetings that are open to the public.

Committees may:

- Pass the bill with or without changes
- Create and pass a new version of the bill
- Reject the bill
- Take no action

**Public meetings:** Committees often hold meetings to discuss bills. These are usually open to the public to attend and give their comments.

**To participate in the lawmaking process,** learn how to contact a legislator, participate in committee meetings, and share your opinion effectively.

**Committee report:** If a committee passes a bill, they will make a report and send it to be read in the House or Senate. The bill then goes to the Rules committee. To see a list of bills reported out of House or Senate committees each day, go to [standing committee reports](#).

During session, the **full committee schedule** can be found under Meeting Schedules. It can be filtered by date, chamber, committee, or bill. The agenda, documents, and video can be viewed for each meeting.

## Rules committees set the schedule

First, legislators submit bills to the House or Senate. Leaders in those chambers choose which committees should receive them. When a rules committee receives a bill, it can either:

- Schedule it for a second reading in the House or Senate
- Take no action

**First rules committee review:** In this first step, the rules committee reviews the bill and decides whether or not to move it to the next step. This is called Rules Review in the House and Rules White in the Senate (the report that lists the bills in this step in the Senate is on white paper).

**Second rules committee review:** In this second step, the rules committee decides whether to schedule the bill for a second reading in the House or Senate. This is called Rules Consideration in the House and Rules Green in the Senate (printed on green paper). Bills sometimes skip this step and go to the calendar for second reading.

**Bills scheduled for readings:** To find out which bills are scheduled for readings, view the links below:

- [House floor activity](#)
- [Senate floor activity](#)

**Budget-related bills:** If the bill has a major effect on the state budget, the rules committee may ask a fiscal committee to review.

From the **floor activity pages**, you can not only see the schedule for the upcoming bills, but see and sort upcoming and previous calendars during session.

## The first chamber votes

Next, members of the House or Senate will debate and vote on bills in up to two separate sessions. These are called the second and third readings.

### Second reading: Debates and changes

At the second reading, members will debate the bill and may vote to change it. If they vote to approve the bill, they'll schedule a third reading for it.

### Third reading: Final vote

At the third reading, members will take a final vote on the bill. If the bill passes, it goes to the other house. To see how members voted on a specific bill, view our [roll calls on a bill](#) page.

The **Cutoff Calendar** shows the deadlines and dates for legislative activities like *House of Origin Cutoff*, *Fiscal Committee Cutoff*, *Opposite House Cutoff*, and *Sine Die*.

## The next chamber repeats the process

The other chamber follows the same steps as the first chamber. If the other house makes changes to the bill, the first house must approve them. If bills pass both chambers, they go to the Governor.

### Settling disagreements between the House and Senate

If the House and Senate disagree on changes to a bill, one of them can ask for a conference committee. At a conference committee, members from each chamber meet and try to come to an agreement.

If they agree on what to do, the conference committee will make a report. Both houses must vote to approve the conference committee report for the bill to pass.

## The Governor makes a choice

Finally, the Governor may sign bills into law or veto them. The Legislature can vote to override a veto. Visit the [bill-to-law cross reference page](#) for a list of bills that went to the Governor.

### What the Governor can do

The Governor makes the final decision on whether a bill should become a law. They may either:

- Sign the bill into law
- Veto all or part of the bill

### About vetoes

A veto is when the Governor rejects an entire bill or certain sections of it. Unless the Legislature overrides a veto, some or all parts of the bill won't become law.

If two-thirds of the members of both houses vote to override a veto, the entire bill will become a law without the Governor's signature.

### Deadlines for the Governor

If the Governor doesn't sign or veto a bill within a certain period, it will become law without their signature. When the Governor receives a bill, they need to act on it:

- Within 5 days if the Legislature is in session, or
- Within 20 days if the Legislature isn't in session

The **Statistical Report** is the number of bills introduced, considered, and passed for each biennium.

The **Selected Steps Report** gives options to pull bills introduced, considered, passed by chamber, passed, vetoed, and signed.

If you are a person with a disability and need a special accommodation, please contact the House at (360) 786-7271, or the Senate at (360) 786-7558. TTY 1-800-833-6388. For further legislative information, call the Legislative Hotline at 1-800-562-6000, or check the internet at [www.leg.wa.gov](http://www.leg.wa.gov).