

The Rhode Island General Assembly

A Brief Guide to the Legislative
Process of Rhode Island

The General Assembly

SENATE

- The upper house
- 38 Seats
- Two year terms
- No term limits

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

- The lower house
- 75 Seats
- Two year terms
- No term limits

Part-Time Legislature

- The General Assembly is required to begin its session on the first Tuesday in January of each year (Constitution Article VI)
- Legislators meet each Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evening beginning at 4:00 PM
- Sessions typically end in June or July each year

Leadership

Senate

- President of the Senate
- Senate Majority Leader
- Senate Minority Leader
- Committee Chairs

House

- Speaker of the House
- House Majority Leader
- House Minority Leader
- Committee Chairs

Senate Committees

- Commerce
- Education
- Environment and Agriculture
- **Finance***
- Government Oversight
- **Health and Human Services***
- **Housing and Municipal Government***
- **Judiciary***
- Labor
- Rules
- **Special Legislation and Veterans' Affairs***

*Committees in bold most commonly hear legislation related to ending homelessness

House Committees

- Corporations
- Environment and Natural Resources
- **Finance***
- **Health, Education, and Welfare***
- **Judiciary***
- Labor
- Municipal Government
- Oversight
- Rules
- Small Business
- **Veterans' Affairs***

*Committees in bold most commonly hear legislation related to ending homelessness

Drafting Legislation

- A legislator has an idea of his or her own, previously failed legislation, suggestions from community members or groups, or model legislation from other states
- The bill is presented to the Legislative Counsel Office to be drafted
- Once the bill is drafted, it is returned to the legislator that introduced it for review
- Once the proposing legislator reviews the drafted bill, he or she may request other colleagues to sign onto the bill

Introduction of Legislation

- During session, the Speaker of the House or the President of the Senate will ask if there is any “new business.”
- Legislators who are introducing bills will raise it from his or her seat and a page will collect it
- The bill will be assigned a number by its respective house and logged into the legislative computer system

What's Next?

- The President of the Senate will refer Senate bills to the appropriate committees for review
- The Speaker of the House will refer House legislation to appropriate committees for review

Committee Actions and Recommendations

- Committees take testimony from the public during hearings
- After hearing a bill, they may:
 - Pass as introduced
 - Pass with amendments (“Substitute A”)
 - Refer to another committee
 - Hold for further study

Passing Legislation

- After a committee recommends passage, the bill is put on the calendar for voting on the floor
- If a bill passes after the voting, the bill is then transmitted to the other house to repeat the process
- If both houses concur, the bill is then forwarded to the Governor

The Governor's Desk

- If favorable, the Governor will sign the bill into law. It is then transmitted to the Secretary of State to alert the originating house of its approval.
- If the Governor chooses to veto, the bill is sent back to the general assembly. Both houses vote again on the bill; if each house achieves a 3/5 majority in favor, the veto will be overridden.
- The Governor may choose not to sign or veto a bill. On the seventh day (excepting Sunday) after the Governor was presented with the bill, it becomes law.

When Legislation Becomes Law

- Statutes go into effect as prescribed by the language found within the statute
- If there is no date expressed within the statute, then it shall go into effect on the first day of July during the year of passage by the General Assembly