

# What is the Legislature, and how does it work?

The Louisiana Legislature consists of elected representatives in the House and Senate chambers. It can enact laws that govern the state and its residents.

Both chambers are also allowed to elect leaders from among its members to help organize and mediate the legislative process. The House elects a Speaker of the House, while the Senate elects a President.

Louisiana’s Legislature meets annually for what we call “sessions.” In even-numbered years, the legislative session runs approximately for — weeks and primarily focuses on non-fiscal issues, while the legislative session runs approximately — weeks during odd-ending years and primarily focuses on fiscal issues (e.g., taxes).

A governor can also call “special legislative session” in order to deal with legislative matters outside of the regularly-scheduled legislative calendar. These sessions can last no more than 30 days and are limited to the topics proclaimed by the governor.

## FUN FACTS:

- The state’s constitution allows for 39 senators and 105 members of the House.
- Lawmakers meet for 85 days during even-numbered years but only 60 days in odd-numbered years. They have fewer days, 60 and 45, respectively, to conduct official legislative business.
- During odd-numbered years, lawmakers can only pass up to 5 non-fiscal bills. The odd years are dedicated to dealing with money matters.





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# How are bills passed?

The process for a bill to become a law is very long. Most bills will die before they receive a vote by any chamber members. Why? Well, here are the steps a bill takes:

## 1. Drafting and filing

The first step of the life cycle of any bill is for a lawmaker (or lawmakers) in either the House or Senate to file a draft of the proposed legislation. That lawmaker is known as the bill's author.

## 2. Committee

Next, lawmakers introduce the bill in the chamber where it was filed and assign it to a committee. Committees have specific focuses, such as the House's Criminal Justice Committee, and they are responsible for debating bills, calling for public testimony, and making amendments. LAPCS generally focuses on the Senate's Education Committee.

The committee stage is where most bills go to die. A bill can only make it out of committee if most members approve it, with or without amendments, and send it to the full House or Senate for a vote.

## 3. Vote from the floor

Once it reaches the floor of either chamber, all members will have a chance to debate it and propose amendments before a full vote.

## 4. On to the next chamber

After a bill receives approval from a majority of lawmakers in a chamber, it moves to the opposite chamber and repeats the committee and vote process all over again. If the bill passes the other side without any major changes, it will go to the governor's desk.

If major amendments are made to the bill, it must first go to a conference committee comprised of members of both houses to work out the changes before it heads to the governor's desk. There is more to it, but let's not get in the weeds.

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# How are bills passed? (Cont.)

## 5. The governor's desk

Once a bill reaches the governor's desk, the governor has three options. He or she can:

1. Sign the bill into law,
2. Veto it, or,
3. Let it pass into law without signing it. If a bill is not signed or vetoed within a certain timeframe, it becomes law.

If the governor vetoes a bill, lawmakers can reconvene for a veto session and override the governor with a 2/3 majority vote by both chambers. If the veto is overturned, the bill becomes law.

All bills passed into law during the regular session go into effect on August 1 unless the bill has a different prescribed time after that date. During special sessions, bills passed into law go into effect 60 days after the session is adjourned unless the law has another specified date.

## How can I keep up with bills moving through the Legislature?

The Louisiana Legislature's website has [a bill lookup](#) tool, allowing you to see what stage a filed bill is in, read the bill's text, and see recorded votes. You can also search bills by their number, author, committee, or summary.

You can also find out when the House and Senate meet and see committee agendas on each chamber's websites. Both provide broadcasts of committee meetings and full chamber votes.

The state Legislature has also created an app, [LaLege](#), to make it easier to find information about lawmakers, bills, House and Senate schedules, and maps of the state Capitol. Of course, for all things charter school-related, you can sign up for our newsletter by scrolling to the bottom of our [homepage](#).