

ORGANIZATION OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT

The government of the State of New Jersey, like that of the United States, is divided into three branches: the legislative, the executive, and the judicial.

The principal function of the Legislature is to enact laws. The Executive branch, comprised of the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and State agencies, carries out the programs established by law. The Judiciary, which includes all courts, punishes violators and settles controversies and disputes. The Supreme Court is the final authority on the meaning and constitutionality of laws.

LEGISLATORS

The Legislature consists of two Houses, a 40-member Senate and an 80-member General Assembly. Each House has age and residency requirements for members.

Service in the Legislature is considered to be part-time and most legislators also hold other employment.

LEGISLATIVE DISTRICTS

Legislators are elected from 40 legislative districts of substantially equal population. The voters in each district elect one Senator and two members of the General Assembly.

Every ten years, upon the results of the Federal census, the boundaries of the 40 districts are redrawn to maintain an equal population in each district.

LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS

Legislative elections are held in November of each odd-numbered year. Members of the General Assembly serve two-year terms. Senators serve for four years, except for the first term of a new decade, which is only two years. This 2-4-4 cycle allows for elections from new districts as soon as possible after reapportionment.

Interim appointments are made to fill vacant legislative seats by the county committee or committees of the party of the vacating legislator.

LEGISLATIVE ORGANIZATION

Each House elects a presiding officer – the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the General Assembly. They are second and third in line of succession to the governorship after the Lieutenant Governor and may serve as Acting Governor.

The President and the Speaker have broad powers within their respective Houses. They decide the meeting schedules and the daily calendar of bills to be considered; preside over the sessions; appoint committee chairs and members; refer bills to committee for consideration; and direct the business of their Houses.

Each party in each House also chooses a leader, assistant leaders, and “whips.” Party leaders help develop party policy on the issues before the Legislature.

Each House establishes standing reference committees to review legislation specific to subject areas.

Much of the discussion on the merits of a bill takes place in committee. Representatives of interest groups and members of the public are generally given the opportunity to present their views at committee meetings.

LEGISLATIVE POWERS

The chief function of the Legislature is to enact laws. A proposal to make a new law, or to change or repeal an existing law, is presented to the Legislature as a bill. To become law, a bill must pass both Houses by a majority vote and be approved by the Governor. (The chart on the reverse side presents the steps in the process.)

The Legislature may also propose amendments to the New Jersey Constitution. The proposed amendment must be passed by a vote of three-fifths of each House before being placed on the ballot in November for a public vote. An amendment may also be presented to the voters if the Legislature passes it two years in a row by a simple majority vote.

- Additional powers of the Legislature include:
- Enacting an annual appropriations bill outlining all State spending;
 - Senatorial approval of the Governor’s appointments;
 - Ratification of amendments to the U.S. Constitution;
 - Judgment of the elections and qualifications of its members;
 - Institution and conduct of impeachment proceedings against State officials;
 - Review of administrative rules and regulations.

LEGISLATIVE SESSIONS

Each Legislature is in session for two years. All business conducted in the first year may be continued in the second year. At the end of the second year, all unfinished business expires.

Typically, the Legislature meets on Mondays and Thursdays.

Other days may be devoted to committee meetings and public hearings.

Joint sessions are occasionally held, most often for an address by the Governor. Floor sessions and committee meetings are open to the public.

RESOLUTIONS

Resolutions primarily are used to express the sentiments of the members, create and empower temporary authorities, and regulate internal legislative organization. A joint resolution must pass both Houses and be signed by the Governor. A concurrent resolution must pass both Houses, but is not presented to the Governor. A simple resolution is considered only by the House in which it is proposed.

CONTACTING YOUR LEGISLATORS

Legislators value the opinions and suggestions of their constituents. Through their professionally staffed district offices, legislators are prepared to respond to requests for information about legislative matters or provide assistance in dealing with State agencies.

You may call or write to legislators at their district offices. Contact information is available on the legislative website (njleg.org) or by calling the toll-free number below. You can also write to them at:

c/o New Jersey Senate, State House
P.O. Box 099, Trenton, NJ 08625-0099 *or*
c/o New Jersey General Assembly, State House
P.O. Box 098, Trenton, NJ 08625-0098

LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION

The Legislative Information and Bill Room answers inquiries about bills and legislative procedures and provides copies of bills, meeting schedules, and contact information.

Hours: 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. on business days and evening service during legislative sessions

Phone: (800) 792-8630

Hearing Impaired: Dial 711 for NJ Relay

Address: Legislative Information and Bill Room
State House Annex, P.O. Box 068,
Trenton, NJ 08625-0068

Email: leginfo@njleg.njleg.org

Website: njleg.gov



THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS IN NEW JERSEY

NEW JERSEY LEGISLATURE

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE SERVICES



THE PATH OF LEGISLATION IN NEW JERSEY

1 IDEA DEVELOPED

A legislator from either the Senate or General Assembly may sponsor a bill independently or at the suggestion of a constituent, interest group, public official, or the Governor.
The legislator may ask other legislators in the same House to join as co-sponsors.

2 BILL DRAFTED

At the legislator's direction, the Office of Legislative Services – a non-partisan agency of the Legislature – provides research and drafting assistance and prepares the bill in proper technical form.

3 BILL INTRODUCED

The prime sponsor delivers the bill to the House. Copies of the proposed bill are printed.
The bill title is read aloud at the next session by the Senate Secretary or General Assembly Clerk. This is the first reading.
The bill is made available in electronic form.

4 COMMITTEE REFERENCE

The President of the Senate or Speaker of the General Assembly usually refers the bill to a committee for review, but may send the bill directly to second reading to hasten its consideration.

5 COMMITTEE ACTION

When scheduled by the chair, the committee considers the bill at an open public meeting.
The committee may report the bill to the House as is, with amendments, or by a substitute bill. If not considered or reported, the bill remains in committee.

6 SECOND READING

When the bill is reported to the floor (or referred directly without committee review), its title is read aloud for the second reading. The bill can also be amended on the floor at this point.

7 THIRD READING

When scheduled by the President or Speaker, the bill is given a third reading. As it is posted for a vote, members may debate the bill. To ensure thorough consideration, rules prohibit a second and third reading on the same day, except by an emergency vote of 3/4 of the members.

8 HOUSE VOTE

A bill passes each House when approved by a majority of the authorized members (21 votes in the Senate, 41 votes in the Assembly).

9 SECOND HOUSE

When a bill is delivered to the second House, it goes through the same process from first reading and committee referral through final vote. If the second House amends the bill, it is returned to the first House for a vote on the changes. A bill receives final legislative approval only when it passes both Houses in identical form.

10 GOVERNOR'S ACTION

After legislative passage, the bill is sent to the Governor. The Governor may sign it, conditionally veto it (returning it for changes), or veto it absolutely. The Governor may also veto single line items of appropriation bills.

11 LAW

A bill becomes law upon the Governor's signature or after 45 days if no action is taken. If the House of origin is not in session on the 45th day, the time is extended until it reconvenes. (Different rules apply to bills passed during the last 45 days of a two-year session).
If vetoed, a bill can become law if the Legislature overrides the veto by a 2/3 vote. A law takes effect on the day specified in its text or, if unspecified, the next July 4th.