

How a Bill Becomes a Law in New Jersey

A Student's Guide to the Legislative Process

What is the difference between the New Jersey Legislature and the United States Congress?

The NJ Legislature meets in Trenton, New Jersey's capital city, and makes laws only for New Jersey. The US Congress meets in our nation's capital, Washington, D.C., and creates laws for all 50 states.

How is the New Jersey government organized?

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

Made up of elected representatives from 40 districts within the state

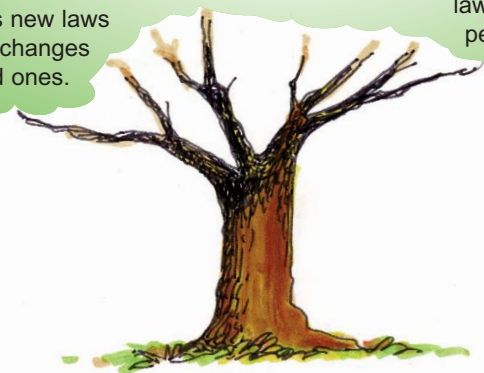
Makes new laws and changes old ones.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Made up of the Governor, Lieutenant Governor and State Agencies
Carries out programs that are created by law.

JUDICIAL BRANCH

Made up of all courts
Explains the meaning of laws, settles arguments about laws, and punishes people who don't obey laws.

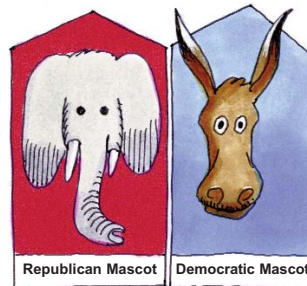


How is the Legislature organized?

The Legislature is made up of 120 members elected from 40 legislative districts in New Jersey. These men and women are called "legislators," and represent the views and concerns of people who live in their area.

Legislators belong to one of two groups called "Houses." The Houses are called the "Senate" and "General Assembly." There are 40 senators and 80 General Assembly members. Each House has a chief officer. In the Senate, the officer is called the "Senate President." In the General Assembly, the officer is called the "Assembly Speaker."

Legislators within both Houses belong to political groups called "parties." The two major parties are "Democrats" and "Republicans." The party that has more members is called the "majority party."



The New Jersey Legislature • Office of Legislative Services • Office of Public Information
State House Annex, PO Box 068, Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0068 • www.njleg.state.nj.us

Who can be a legislator?

A State Senator must be at least 30 years old and have lived in New Jersey for at least four years. A member of the General Assembly must be at least 21 and have lived in the state for at least two years. Both must have lived in the district they represent for one year before the election.

What are legislative districts?

New Jersey is divided into 40 legislative districts. The people in each district elect one senator and two General Assembly members. Each district has about the same number of people living in it. Every ten years, an official count, called a "census," is taken of all the people in our state and new borders are drawn to keep the number of people within each district equal. Senators serve one two-year term and then two four-year terms each decade so that every ten years they are elected based upon the new districts. General Assembly members always serve terms of two years.



When does the Legislature meet?

A new legislative session begins every two years. The Houses usually meet on Mondays and Thursdays. Most years, both Houses recess during July and August.

How can I get involved in making laws?

Learn what is going on by reading the newspaper, watching the news, and talking to people. Share your thoughts with family, friends, neighbors and community leaders. Contact your legislators and tell them about your ideas.

When you become 18, register to vote. Vote for people who you think will best represent you and your community.

How can I find out who my legislators are?

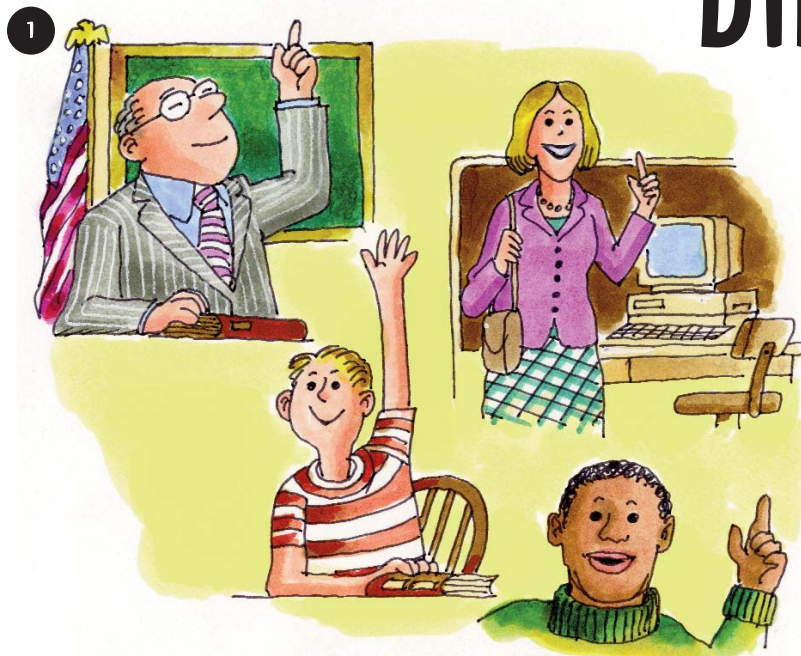
Go to the New Jersey Legislature's web site, www.njleg.state.nj.us or call the Legislative Information and Bill Room at 1-800-792-8630 (Toll-free in NJ).

How can I learn more about lawmaking in New Jersey?

Visit the New Jersey State House. Admission is free and tours are given Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m., and the first and third Saturday of the month, 12 p.m. - 3 p.m. For more information, call 609-847-3150.



Bill's Journey to Becoming a Law



Any Senate or General Assembly member may propose or sponsor a new law. Ideas for laws can come from many sources, such as citizens, interest groups, public officials or the Governor.



At the legislator's direction, the idea is written as a bill. The legislator may ask other legislators to become co-sponsors.



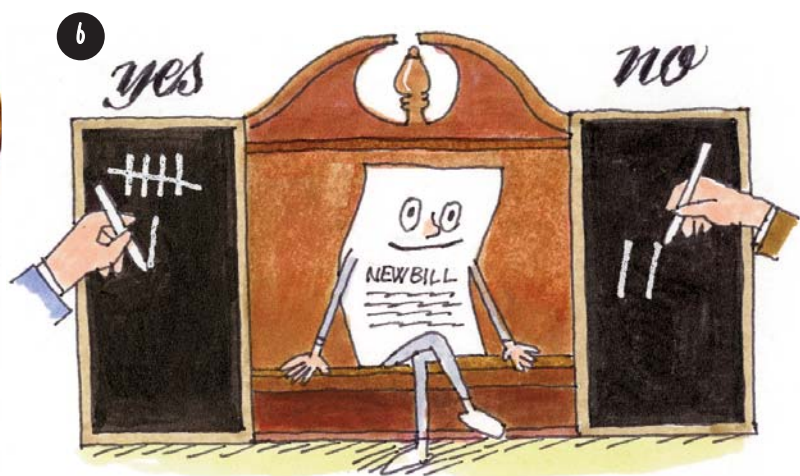
The bill is introduced when the Senate Secretary or General Assembly Clerk reads the bill's number, sponsor and title aloud during a legislative session.



The bill is usually sent to a committee which studies it and makes changes, if needed. These changes are called amendments. Committees have open meetings where the public may speak about the bill.



If the committee approves the bill, it is reported back to the House where it began, and its title is read again. This is the bill's second reading.



When scheduled by the Senate President or General Assembly Speaker, the bill's title is read for the third time, and it is debated and voted on. A bill passes if it receives a majority of votes (at least 21 in the Senate or 41 in the General Assembly).



The bill follows a similar path of first reading, committee consideration, second reading, third reading and final passage in the second House. After both Houses agree on the bill, it is sent to the Governor. In most cases, the bill becomes law when signed by the Governor.



If the Governor rejects the bill, it is called a veto. Sometimes, the Governor will ask the Legislature to make changes to the bill. The Legislature may make the Governor's changes. It is also possible for the Legislature to pass the vetoed bill in its original form with a 2/3 majority vote in both Houses. This is called overriding the veto.