

Glossary of legislative and regulatory terms

A

Act (law, statute) - a bill or proposed legislative measure that has been passed by both houses of the General Assembly and signed by the governor, passed over his veto or allowed to become effective without his signature.

Ad Hoc - established for a particular purpose without reference to wider or permanent applications, such as ad hoc committees.

Adjournment - to end a legislative day.

Adjournment Sine Die - adjournment with-out naming a day for reconvening, usually refers to the end of a two-year legislative session.

Adopt: To vote to accept

Amendment - changes to specific portions of a proposed law. Amendments may be offered in committee or on the House or Senate floor. Amendments may be introduced at several points and are themselves subject to amendment.

Apportionment - the allocation of legislative seats. Apportionment is readjusted in every decade following the census, with legislative districts drawn based on population.

Appropriation - an act that permits the government to make expenditures and to incur obligations for specific purposes. An appropriation usually is limited in amount for the time covered by the approved budget.

Appropriations Committees - the committees in both the House and Senate that consider all legislation that proposes state expenditures. These two committees also are responsible for analyzing the governor's budget proposal.

Authorization - an act approving a project, program, or activity, outlining its purposes and procedures, assigning authority for its administration and, usually, fixing maximum amounts of money to be expended upon it. An appropriation provides the funds.

B

Bill - the draft of a proposed law introduced in either the Senate or House of Representatives. The Legislative Reference Bureau assists legislators in writing bills to ensure that they carry out the intent of their sponsors, avoid conflict with other laws and are in correct legal form. Bills are numbered in each house in the order of their introduction, and they remain in an active status for the duration of a two-year legislative session. Bills also have a printer's number located on the front page; each time a bill is amended, it is reprinted and receives a new printer's number.

Bills Referred to Committee - bills to be introduced are delivered to the speaker of the House or president pro tempore of the Senate. The proposals then are assigned to the appropriate committee for consideration.

Bill History- a listing of all the bills and resolutions introduced in the General Assembly and the actions taken on them by each chamber.

Bluebacks - the name and color the cover for a legislator's proposal in its initial stage. After a blueback is duplicated for distribution to all members, it is known as a bill.

Brass rail: Runs behind the law row of members' desks just below the visitors' gallery; members standing behind the brass rail are not on the House floor and cannot speak in debate or vote on a question.

Budget - a complete financial blueprint for a given period, usually one fiscal year that begins on July 1 and ends on June 30. For state government, the budget actually is in the form of appropriations bills, which establish spending levels for authorized programs.

C

Calendar - a list of bills that have been approved by committees and now are to be considered by the full House or Senate. The list serves as an agenda or order of business for a chamber.

Caucus - a private, closed meeting of members of the same political party to discuss positions on legislation and other matters of party strategy.

Chamber - either the Senate or House of Representatives.

Chief Clerk - the chief administrative officer (not a member) of the House of Representatives who is responsible for day-to-day operations of the chamber. The chief clerk also convenes the House to elect the speaker and supervises the printing of all bills and journals. In the Senate, the chief clerk serves as the chamber's chief fiscal officer.

Cloture - a parliamentary device for halting debate and bringing an issue to a vote; used in the U.S. Senate to end filibusters.

Committee - a designated group of people empowered to examine and report on pending legislation or to conduct investigations and studies as directed by the parent body.

Compromise: Settle differences of opinion through discussion

Concurrent Resolution - a measure affecting action or procedures of both houses, also used to express sympathy or commendation.

Conference Committee - when the House and Senate cannot agree upon a pending measure, each body appoints members to a conference committee to meet for the purpose of arranging a compromise. Three members from each chamber are appointed to the conference committee,

two from the majority party and one from the minority party. The six conferees must confine themselves to the differences that exist between the House and Senate; their report then must be approved by each chamber before it can be presented to the governor for final approval.

Congress - the United States Senate and House of Representatives. The Senate has 100 members, two from each of the 50 states. The House has 435 members, with membership apportioned according to population, except that each state must have at least one representative.

Congressional Session - a Congress extends over two calendar years and each congress is divided into two sessions.

Consideration: A bill must be "considered" by the Chamber three times before it can potentially be passed to the Governor for signature. Consideration can involve discussion and debate by the Chamber's members, testimony, amendments, and ultimate votes in favor or opposition.

Constituent: A citizen who resides in the district of a legislator

Constitution: The written instrument embodying the fundamental principles of the state that establishes power and duties of the government and guarantees certain rights to the people

Constitutional Majority - the Pennsylvania Constitution requires a majority vote of members elected to each chamber for final passage of a bill (102 in the House, 26 in the Senate).

Convene: To meet in formal legislative session

Co-sponsors - legislators who join in the sponsorship of a bill, thus signifying their support.

Co-sponsorship Memo: A document that aims to a.) describe in plain language, the intent of the bill and b.) invite legislators to sign-on in support of the bill, as "co-sponsors."

D

Debate - consists of arguments by legislators for or against some proposed action. A legislator desiring to debate first must gain recognition from the presiding officer of the chamber.

Decorum: Appropriate behavior and conduct

District: That area of the state represented by a legislator; who must live in the district he/she represents

E

Enabling Legislation - an act that allows a department or governmental subdivision of the commonwealth to carry out some action it otherwise would not have the authority to do.

Enactment, date of - the day in which a bill becomes law.

Executive Directors: Every Committee has two Executive Directors who are the lead staff for the Majority and Minority Chairs of the Committee. The Executive Directors oversee the Committee's

legislative efforts and provide context, information, and stakeholder input to Committee members as they consider bills.

Executive Order - a rule issued by the governor that interprets a provision of law, relates to the operation of a particular agency or establishes some direction or procedure to be followed. Executive orders are published in the Pennsylvania Bulletin and have the general effect of law.

E

Fiscal Note - a statement of the fiscal impact of a proposed bill.

Fiscal Year - the operational year of the government. For state government, it begins July 1 and ends June 30 of the following calendar year. The federal fiscal year is Oct. 1- Sept. 30.

Filibuster - delaying tactic, usually by prolonged speech making, employed on a chamber floor by a legislator seeking to block a vote or compel a majority to modify its legislative program. This tactic generally is used in the U.S. Congress.

Floor - (1) the area within each chamber reserved for members, as distinguished from the visitor galleries; or (2) an assemblage of the entire body of either house, or a quorum thereof, in its chamber for the purpose of doing legislative business. Hence, such expressions as "floor amendments" and "on the floor."

G

Gallery: The seating area for visitors located above the House floor on the balcony

General Appropriation Bill - a single piece of legislation containing numerous individual appropriations. It contains only appropriations for the executive, legislative and judicial departments for the commonwealth, for the public debt and for public schools. This often is referred to as the "budget bill." All other appropriations are made by separate bills, each concerning one subject.

General Assembly: Pennsylvania's legislative body of elected officials that consider and make laws.

Germane - relevant to the subject matter of the bill or issue under consideration.

Governor: The highest ranking state official, elected every four years

Grandfather Clause - provision of law exempting certain parties from revised standards of a new law.

H

Hearing - meeting of a legislative committee or other body held to receive oral and written testimony on a particular bill or proposal from specialists, government officials or the public.

House - the House of Representatives or, in lower-case usage, either body or "house" of a bicameral legislature.

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Identification - bills and resolutions are numbered in the order of introduction. Senate bills are prefixed "SB," and House bills are designated "HB." Resolutions are prefixed "HR" or "SR."

Impeachment- a formal accusation enacted by the House of Representatives in the form of a resolution and transmitted to the Senate to initiate the removal of a civil officer. The impeachment then is tried by the Senate sitting as a court.

Item Veto - the Pennsylvania Constitution empowers the governor to disapprove part or all of any item or items of any bill making appropriations of money. The part or parts of the bill approved become law and the item or items disapproved by the item veto become void.

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Joint Resolution - a measure used to propose an amendment to the state constitution; it requires action by both the Senate and House and is not sent to the governor.

Joint Session - a meeting of the full General Assembly. The Senate and House meet in a joint session to receive the governor's budget proposal and other addresses and to convene each new legislative session.

Journal - the official record of the proceedings of the Senate and House.

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Law - an act that has been signed by the governor or that the General Assembly passes over the governor's veto.

Legislative Day - a legislative day refers to a calendar day during which the House or Senate is in session. Legislative days are not necessarily consecutive because the House or Senate recesses for the weekends, holidays, and days when members perform legislative business away from the House or Senate floor.

Legislative Reference Bureau – the bill-drafting agency of the General Assembly.

Legislator: A member of the legislature

Legislature: A body responsible for making laws. The terms, "legislature," "General Assembly," "Congress," "the Capitol," and "the Hill," are often used interchangeably to refer to this legislative body of elected officials. It is important to note, though, that the state and federal legislatures are distinct legislative bodies—the General Assembly makes laws that govern Pennsylvania; Congress makes laws that govern the country. There are links, but also clear distinctions. Both State and Federal legislatures are often referred to as "the Capitol" or "the Hill."

Lobbyist - a person who seeks, either as an individual or as an agent, to make legislators aware of the needs and interests of a particular constituency so as to influence the development of legislation. Lobbyists must be registered with the state.

K

Kill the Bill: If legislators do not support a bill, they can “kill it,” by voting against it, and by convincing their colleagues to join them in that vote. Advocacy groups also work to kill a bill they find problematic for their work and constituents. A bill can be “killed,” in Committee or on the Floor.

M

Mace: The House symbol of authority, peace, order and respect for the law; it is made of carved mahogany capped by a brass globe engraved with the Pennsylvania coat of arms and topped by an American eagle

Mace bearer: This official precedes the speaker to the House rostrum before each day’s session, carrying the mace and at the end of a session, rises, removes the mace from its special pedestal and ceremoniously escorts the speaker from the chamber.

Majority party: The political party having the most seats in the House of Representatives and the Senate

Mark-Up of a Bill - the section-by-section review and revision of a bill by committee or sub-committee members. This term usually is used in describing the federal legislative process.

Members: 203 state representatives elected for a two-year term by Pennsylvania residents; a representative must be a U.S. citizen at least 21 years of age, a Pennsylvania resident for at least four years and a resident of the legislative district for at least one year before the general election

Minority party: The political party having the least number of seats in a house.

Motion - parliamentary request by a legislator for a substantive or procedural action in committee or on the floor, usually becoming effective upon majority vote or with the approval of the presiding officer.

O

Oath of Office: An oath or vow taken by a public official prior to taking up his or her official duties.

Order of Business: The defined routine of procedure in the legislative body each day, it can be deviated from only by a waiver of the rules.

Override a Veto - a veto by the governor is overridden if two-thirds of both houses pass the bill after it is sent back to the house of origin with the governor's objections.

P

Pages: men and women who deliver messages, distribute paperwork and run errands for members

Pamphlet Laws - volume published by the Pennsylvania Legislative Reference Bureau that contains the text of acts passed during the past legislative session. (The Pennsylvania School Boards Association reprints and distributes for its members the text of newly enacted state laws that are of interest to school officials.)

Parliamentarian - an officer of the House of Representatives who assists in rendering correct parliamentary decisions and in ensuring that the practices and precedents of the House are conducted according to law. This officer must be well-versed in the rules and precedents of the House in order to render sound decisions at a moment's notice.

Passage: Favorable action on a measure before the legislature

Pennsylvania Bulletin - the official gazette of the commonwealth. It is published weekly and contains all proposed and final rules and regulations; governor's executive orders; state contract notices; summaries of enacted statutes; statewide and local court rules; attorney general opinions; and other documents authorized by law. All proposed regulations must be published in the Pennsylvania Bulletin before becoming enacted and legally enforceable.

Pennsylvania Code - the official codification of the rules and regulations issued by commonwealth agencies.

Pocket Veto - if Congress should adjourn during the 10-day period given the president for the consideration of a bill, he may withhold his signature and allow the bill to die, without explanation. If Congress remains in session, or should reconvene before the end of the 10-day period, the bill becomes law if the president does not sign.

Political Subdivision - in Pennsylvania, defined as any county, city, borough, incorporated town, township, school district.

Point of Order: Members use this phrase to question a procedure at any time during a debate, even if it means interrupting someone who is speaking.

President Pro Tempore - the presiding officer, or "temporary president," of the Senate in the absence of the lieutenant governor. On the federal level, the president pro tempore serves in the absence of the vice president.

Public Laws - federal statutes are referred to as public laws. They are designated by the two-year Congress in which they were passed, plus a sequential number indicating the order of enactment, such as PL.107-334. Enactment refers to the point at which a law is signed by the president or passed by a veto override.

Q

Quorum - minimum number of members required to be present for action to be taken in a legislative or governing body.

R

Readings of Bill- the Pennsylvania Constitution requires that a bill receive consideration on three different days. The first day the legislation is read, but no debate or amendments are permitted from the floor at this stage; on the second day, the bill can be debated and amended if the amendments are germane to the subject of the bill; on the third day, a final vote is taken.

Ranking Minority Member - the senior member, in terms of service, of the minority party of a committee.

Recess: A temporary pause in the proceedings

Recommit a Bill - a motion made on the floor to send a bill back to the committee reporting it.

Regulation - an official interpretation of a statute, detailing the steps to be taken in its administration and enforcement.

Repeal: To delete

Report a Bill from Committee - the return of a bill from a committee to the desk of the Speaker of the House or Senate president pro tempore.

Resolution - a measure used by a single house to take action affecting its own procedure or expressing an opinion.

Roll call boards: Large tally boards flash on opposite walls of the House, reflecting in alphabetical order how members voted; members vote at their desks by pressing green or red buttons which light the respective "yea" and "nay" columns on the boards.

Roll-Call Vote - calling the names of members for a recorded vote.

Rules: Provisions for the procedure, organization, officers and committees of each house of the legislature

S

Secretary of the Senate - chief administrative officer of the Senate (not a member) responsible for the direction of employees, administration of oaths, registration of lobbyists and other tasks necessary to the operation of the Senate.

Sergeant at Arms: The person in each house who is responsible for the security of the legislative house and the maintenance of that house's property.

Session - the General Assembly meets as a continuing body for a two-year time period known as a legislative session.

Speaker of the House - the presiding officer of the House of Representatives. The speaker rules on questions of order, appoints committee chairpersons, appoints conference and special committees, and performs other duties. This position is the first among House leadership.

Special Session - the governor may call a special session whenever, in his opinion, the public interest requires one to resolve some urgent pending issue.

Sponsor - a legislator who introduces a bill or who joins a group of legislators in supporting and introducing a bill.

Standing Committee - a permanent committee that is authorized and named by Senate or House rules. Standing committees serve as the workshops of the Legislature. It is their duty to carefully study all bills referred to them and to prepare bills to be reported with a favorable recommendation to each house.

T

Table: If a bill is "laid on the table," it may be considered at a later date. If it is "removed from the table," it is up for possible consideration and may be placed on its Chamber's calendar.

V

Veto - the disapproval of a bill by the governor. A veto occurs when the governor refuses to sign a bill and returns it to the house of its origin with written reasons for the refusal stated as the "veto message."

Vote: A decision on a question, either affirmative or negative

Voting Schedule: The House and Senate post their voting schedule daily. This is a schedule that shows which bills are being considered by the Chambers' and whether those bills are on first, second, or third consideration.

W

Whips: Assistant floor leaders who act as links between their party members and majority and minority leaders, keeping them informed and encouraging their votes along party lines