

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# How a Bill Becomes a Law

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b'

A bill is a document that explains how a proposed law would work. Every bill starts as an idea. The idea may come from a constituent, another part of the government, or a special interest group. If a representative or senator supports the idea, they can introduce it as a bill to Congress. Congress is made up of two chambers: the Senate and the House of Representatives. Most of the time, a bill can be introduced in either chamber. Once introduced, a bill must be approved by a committee before it can be voted on. Each chamber is divided into committees to handle legislative work more efficiently and allow for specialization. Committees focus on specific topic areas. For example, the House Ways and Means Committee focuses on taxation, and the Senate Armed Services Committee focuses on military matters. Standing Committees are permanent and handle long-term issues, while Select Committees are created to handle temporary issues.

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2. b'

A committee researches, discusses, and makes changes to a given bill. Once a bill is written in formal legal language, committee members vote on it. If they reject it, the bill may be sent to a subcommittee for further research or it might be killed. If accepted, the bill goes to the House or Senate floor for debate. In the Senate, a bill goes to the floor directly after committee approval. In the House of Representatives, it must also pass through the Rules Committee. This committee creates rules for debate and decides whether or not a given bill goes to a full vote. In some cases, similar bills are going through both the House and Senate at the same time. When this happens, a conference committee of both senators and representatives is formed to reconcile differences between the two bills. Once one bill is created, it goes back to each chamber for a vote.

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3. b'

Once a bill reaches the floor for consideration, members of the House or Senate can debate the bill and propose changes or amendments before voting. If more than half of the House or Senate votes in favor of a bill, it will pass on to the other chamber for consideration. Since majority rules, a bill in front of the 435-member House of Representatives requires at least 218 votes to pass. A bill in front of the 100-member Senate requires at least 51 votes to pass. Once a bill reaches the other chamber, the process starts all over again. If the bill makes it through both chambers, it moves on to the president.

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4. b'

Once a bill reaches the president, he or she has three options: sign the bill into law, veto the bill, or do nothing. If the president vetoes a bill, Congress can override the veto by voting on it again. This time, a two-thirds majority in each chamber is required to override the president's decision. If this doesn't happen, the bill is dead. If the president does nothing, one of two things will happen after 10 days pass. If Congress is in session, the bill can be picked up and passed into law without the president's signature. If Congress is not in session, usually because a term has ended, the bill is treated as if it were vetoed. This is called a pocket veto. A pocket veto is useful to a president who doesn't want a law to pass, but would prefer not to veto it for political reasons.

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Passing a bill into law is a complicated process, but it is complicated by design to ensure a bill is carefully considered. Throughout the process, there are plenty of points at which a bill can be killed beyond getting vetoed or failing to get a majority vote. The Speaker of the House or Senate Majority Leader can refuse to refer a bill to committee. A committee can decide to take no action or vote against a bill. In the Senate, leadership can refuse to schedule a vote. Individual Senators can even threaten to debate until the bill is taken out of consideration, a move known as filibustering. In the House, the Rules Committee can keep a bill from reaching a full floor vote. It is actually much more common for a bill to be killed than it is for it to become law. Congress reviews thousands of bills each year, but only a select few become law.

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