How a Bill Becomes a Law

1st reader

1. A bill is introduced

- A bill is introduced in the House of Delegates or the Senate by a delegate or a senator who acts as the bill's sponsor.
- Often, bills are “cross-filed,” meaning the Senate and the House of Delegates introduce identical bills.

2. Goes to Committee

- The bill is assigned to the relevant standing committee in its chamber of origin (i.e. the House of Delegates or the Senate) for review and consideration.
- The Senate has four standing committees, and the House has six standing committees.

3. Committee hearing

- Committee members hear testimony from the bill's sponsor and other proponents and opponents of the bill.
- Amendments to the bill may be made by the committee.

4. Committee vote

- The chair of the committee decides whether or not to call the bill to a vote.
- The committee vote may be favorable (with or without amendment), unfavorable or without recommendation; if favorable, the bill moves out of committee for a full chamber vote.
- If the committee does not call the bill to a vote, the bill stops here.

2nd reader

5. Goes to floor

- If the bill is voted favorable and "out of committee," it returns to the entire chamber of its origin with a report of committee action.
- The bill is open to amendments from the floor.
- Second reader is complete when the bill, with all adopted amendments, is finalized and printed for third reader.

3rd reader

6. 1st chamber vote

- The full chamber of origin votes to pass or reject the bill. To pass, the bill must receive a majority vote. No amendments may be presented at third reader.

7. 2nd chamber

- The bill moves to the opposite chamber and steps 1-6 are repeated.
- Any differences in amendments between the two chambers go to a Conference Committee for reconciliation. The committee makes recommendations via a report to the two chambers; the chambers vote to adopt or reject the report. If they adopt it, they conduct a final full chamber vote; if they do not, the bill fails.

8. Becomes law

- If the bill passes third reader in both chambers, and any differences have been reconciled in Conference Committee, it goes to the governor to be signed into law. If the governor vetos the bill, the legislature can override that veto with a three-fifths majority vote the following session.
- June 1 is the earliest date for signed bills to take effect, but most take effect on October 1.