

VIRGINIA STATE ISSUES



Part One: Navigating the General Assembly

Source: Virginia Conservation Network: Advocacy Bootcamp

“Virginia’s Legislative Session 101”

Brief Overview of the Lawmaking Process

- **This year is a SHORT session, maybe shortest in the US this year**
- Two Chambers in General Assembly (GA)
- House of Delegates = 100 members, two-year terms
54 Dem/ 45 Rep
- Senate = 40 members; four-year terms
21 Dem/19 Rep

Powers of All GA Members:

1. Write and introduce bills
2. Vote
3. Serve on committees

Important Dates:

- Second Wednesday of January is the date when all GA starts.

- Crossover--midway point of session; bills must pass from one side of the chamber to the other to stay alive BEFORE crossover
- “Budget Sunday”--the only bills that can outlive crossover
- “Sine Die” (end of session) (SEE-nay die)

The players:

1. Governor
2. General Assembly (GA)
3. Lobbyists
4. The Public (there are more of us than anyone else)

HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW:



- **This is a very similar process to national bills in Congress!**
- **Our state legislators are forced to be quick with their work because of their limited time in session.**
- **Each house has standing committees which do much of the work *prior* to the beginning of the session.**
- **Bills must pass both houses and be signed by the Governor to become law!**

The Process of a Bill Becoming a Law

- Idea for a Bill then goes to-->Division of Legislative Services to be written out formally and legally and one Legislator becomes “Chief Patron”
- Bill is sent to committee, and it can go to another committee than it is obviously designated to; *the Speaker has control of what committee gets the bill.*
- Committee holds public hearings and they listen to testimony. ANYONE can speak at hearing.

- Vote on Action for Bill
- Bill is voted on and every member casts a vote and bill is sent to opposite chamber. Committee starts process all over again.
- Governor offers changes or signs into law--Can line item veto or fully reject
- Vetoes are reviewed in April
- Laws go into effect on July 1st of same year.

Anyone can give an idea to a lawmaker: ask for a “bill by request” and the Division of Legislative Services (DLS) will write out the idea for you. You can even send the bill to DLS yourself first. Then track the legislation.

Advocacy When Bill is Sent to Committee

- Pressure the Speaker, Committee chairs and members
- Attend committee hearings
- Speak at committee hearings

Advocacy When Bill is Voted On

- Call or email representative
- Track legislation into next chamber
- Repeat committee tactics
- 3000-4000 bills on average at each session

Advocacy When Governor Offers Changes or Sign into Law

- Contact Constituent Service Office

Understanding Committees and Bill Actions

- Think of them as gatekeepers
- Designated by topic
- Most have subcommittees
- House subcommittee can kill a bill
- Senate subcommittees can only recommend action

Bill Actions require one member to “move” additional members to “second” and a committee vote. Types of Bill Actions:

REPORT Bill moves on, the only “success” action

PASS BY INDEFINITELY kills it

PASS BY FOR THE DAY considered next meeting

STRIKE removes from consideration

REFER send to different committee

LAY ON THE TABLE 99% it kills the bill

INCORPORATE the bill is rolled into another similar bill

A tie means the motion fails. Ties almost always a death sentence.

How to Track a Bill

To track legislation, use these links:

- LIS (Virginia Legislative Information System--LIS) <https://lis.virginia.gov/>
- Virginia Public Access Project <https://www.vpap.org/>

Where you can

- Check status of the bill
- What committee it's in
- When it's up for full vote
- Who voted for or against legislation
- Know the bill number
- Remember committee actions
- Watch out for deadlines

Virginia's Budget Process Explained

- Budgets created in even years and get a tune up in odd years. Biennium = two years in which a budget is in effect
- “Money Committees” = Appropriations in the House and Finance in the Senate
- Each other's budgets are almost always rejected which makes this system of creating your own budget first and then rejecting each other's process a wasteful one, but the one we have. Then the compromising begins.

- Goes to the Governor and he/she can sign it or make changes or veto parts of it and it goes back to the GA.

