

Tracking a Bill

in Harrisburg



The Lawmaking Process in the PA General Assembly

Before contacting your representatives about a bill you are following, it's important to understand the steps and common roadblocks in the legislative process. Many times, your own representatives will not have the opportunity to vote for or against a bill because it is "stuck in committee," or because the Speaker of the House or President of the Senate will not bring it up for a vote.



When an idea for new legislation is first developed, it is introduced by one or more legislative sponsors, assigned a number, like "House Bill 38", and sent to one of several standing committees for review. Legislation may start in either the House or the Senate. In this example, the bill is introduced in the House first.

There are at least four places where a gatekeeper, always a member of the majority party, can single-handedly stop the progress of a bill.

Gatekeeper #1 House Committee Chair

These committees review the bill, and may hold hearings or gather information. Then they decide whether or not to support the bill.

But, Committee Chairs can refuse to consider the bill. In effect, one vote from the chair can defeat the bill at this stage.



Gatekeeper #2 Speaker of the House

If the bill makes it out of committee, the Speaker of the House may bring it before the chamber for debate and review... or may not.

There are no rules or norms requiring the Speaker to bring a bill to the floor, even if it has broad bipartisan support. This allows the Speaker of the House to stop any legislation he or she is opposed to.



Gatekeeper #3 Senate Committee Chair

When the bill is sent to the Senate, the same process plays out again.



Again, the chair of the standing committee can simply set aside the bill, never advancing it out of committee.

Gatekeeper #4 President pro Tempore of the Senate



If a bill makes it to the Senate, the President pro Tempore can unilaterally decide not to bring it to the floor for a vote, just like in the House.

There may be additional steps that extend the process.

- If the bill involves spending, it has to be considered by the Appropriations Committee in each chamber.
- If amendments are made, the bill has to return to its original committee to be reviewed again.
- Each additional step adds another opportunity for a single gatekeeper to block the bill.
- *When this happens, you can contact the gatekeeper in addition to your own representative.*

Every state legislature follows the same basic committee review and floor vote process. Pennsylvania is unusual because it gives so much power to such a small number of gatekeepers.

So, who should you contact when you want to support or oppose legislation?

Use the www.legis.state.pa.us website to advocate like a pro.

1. Who are your state legislators? Find out [here](#).
2. Where's the bill? Track the bill's progress [here](#).
3. Who are the gatekeepers?

Go to digital version of this page with live links.



Is the bill in the State House?

The Speaker of the House is Rep. Joanna McClinton. Find the House Committee Chairs [here](#).

Is the bill in the State Senate?

The President pro Tempore is Sen Kim Ward. Find the Senate Committee Chairs [here](#).