

The Basics

Civics 101: The link below takes you to documents to inform you on how the legislative process works.

[Legislative Information Center](#)

Regular Legislative Session

The Florida Legislature convenes annually in Tallahassee for 60 days beginning the first Tuesday after the first Monday in March. Comprised of 40 Senators and 120 Representatives, the Florida Legislature passes new laws, repeals current laws, and determines the budget for the next fiscal year during the 60 day session.

Redistricting Legislative Session

After each decennial census, the Legislature is required to redraw the political boundary lines (redistricting) for the Florida House of Representatives, the Florida Senate and Florida's Congressional districts to achieve one basic goal - population equality. This responsibility is delegated to the Florida Legislature by the U.S. Constitution and the Florida Constitution. The last redistricting occurred in the 2012 Legislative Session (January 10 to March 9, 2012). Apportionment is the process of assigning seats in a legislative body among established districts.

Elected Members

State House of Representative members are elected every two years to serve a two-year term. State Senate members have staggered four-year terms. This means 20 members are elected during one two-year cycle and the other 20 during the next. However, special elections are held for such reasons as a legislator resigns or decides to run for another office.

Following elections, each chamber (another word for the House or Senate) meets for Organizational Session meetings. At this time, each chamber chooses a presiding officer – the Senate chooses a President and the House chooses a Speaker. The person elected as President or Speaker usually serves two years. Each chamber's presiding officer is usually a senior legislator in the majority party.

All members of the House and Senate are subject to a constitutional term limit of eight years of service.

Leadership

As its Chamber's presiding officer, the House Speaker and Senate President have a tremendous amount of power. The Speaker enforces, applies and interprets the rules of the House. He/she determines all business before the House; makes all bill referrals to committee or to a calendar; reserves the time for committee meetings and selects the chairs and vice chairs of the House committees. Additionally, the Speaker preserves

order and decorum in the chamber. Members of the House cannot speak without being recognized by the Speaker.

The Senate President has similar duties on the floor or in his/her Chamber.

Both the Speaker and the President are elected by a majority vote to a two-year term in that position.

Special Sessions

The Governor has the authority to convene the Legislature for a special session. There is no limit to the number of special sessions the Governor may call in a calendar year, but usually calls for a special session to address a specific issue not resolved during the regular legislative session.

Committees

There are 16 standing committees in the House and 20 committees in the Senate. The Senate President and the House Speaker assign each legislator to several committees and assign each bill filed to various committees for consideration.

During a committee meeting a proposed bill may receive a hearing. It is at this time that many associations have representatives testify either for or against proposed legislation. The purpose of a hearing can be to:

- Determine the impact of the proposed legislation;
- Seek and obtain information about the proposed legislation;
- Test public opinion;
- Build support for proposals; and/or
- Provide the opportunity for proponents or opponents of the proposed bill to speak.

Committee Action

Committees can act on the bill in several ways. They can:

1. Give a bill a “favorable report,” which means the committee passed the bill;
2. Give the bill a “favorable report with amendments;”
3. Substitute the bill, which is a form of amending the bill, but the substitute must retain the purpose of the original bill;
4. Temporarily pass or “TP” a bill (this is done if the committee wants to postpone taking a vote on the bill);
5. Indefinitely postpone the bill, which basically kills the bill;
6. Never schedule the bill for a hearing, which kills the bill; and/or
7. Kill the bill by not having a majority of favorable votes for the bill.

On-line Sunshine – The official internet site of the Florida Legislature is located at:

<http://www.leg.state.fl.us/>