

How a Bill Becomes a Law – Scenario

Introduction (Setting the Stage)

You are working in the emergency room of a local hospital. Two children are rushed in with multiple injuries including broken bones and lacerations to the head. You learn that the children were riding on the front row of a school bus when a car made an illegal turn in front of the bus causing the bus driver to brake suddenly.

You decide to research similar incidents and notice this is a common occurrence both in the state and nationally. You are also aware of a legislative bill in your state last year to have seatbelts placed on all school buses, but it did not pass; in fact, the bill never progressed past the House Transportation Committee which meant that the bill "died in committee."

Here is an example of the path a bill has to take to become a law in the state of Indiana. The process is very similar in other states. Notice how easy it is for a bill to die along the way.

<https://www.in.gov/gov/files/BillintoLaw.pdf>

Your Idea:

As a constituent of your state and a concerned health care provider, you find yourself troubled that such an important bill focused on child safety would not even pass through its first committee. You decide that if the recommendations to the bill were changed to require seatbelts for those only sitting in the front seats of the bus, the bill might have a better chance of passing. So you discuss the idea with several colleagues and they agree that it would be worth perusing. You do not know how to move this initiative forward so you start exploring. You find out that the idea for a bill can begin with a legislator (elected government official), state agency, business, lobbyist, state-nursing association, or a citizen like you! You find out that Mr. Thomas Jones is your representative to the state legislature, and you realize that he is a parent in your school district.

Putting Your Plan Into Action:

Mr. Jones has been very active in the community. He has three young children who ride the school bus. You see him at a PTA meeting and decide to mention your idea to him. Mr. Jones tells you he is interested in your idea but needs to know more information; how many people feel the same way and how much background information can you give him. He informs you that he will consider supporting the idea if you obtain 1,500 names on a petition from the district and fill out his legislative worksheet for new ideas. You get your friends to canvas the neighborhood where the incident occurred. Within days, you have more than 2,000 signatures of registered voters who support this initiative.

You visit Mr. Jones in his office in the State Capitol and present him with the signatures and the completed legislative worksheet. He discusses this initiative with his colleagues in the house and gets three representatives to agree to sponsor the bill with him. They introduce the bill and it starts its journey through the legislative process. The members of the committee discuss the merits of the bill and then vote on it. If approved, the bill goes to the full House. They will examine the merits of the bill, debate as needed, and vote. If the House does not approve the bill, it may either send it back to the committee it came from or abandon it. If more than half of members approve it, the bill is sent to the other house (in this case, the Senate).

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In the Senate, the process is repeated. If passed, it then goes to the governor to sign into law. The governor reserves the right to veto the bill and send it back to Congress. Both houses of Congress then have three choices:

1. They can change the bill so it is more to the governor's liking; or
2. They can agree that the bill will never be passed and let it go; or
3. They can vote to override the governor's veto.

In order for Congress to override the governor's signature, they need to have two-thirds of the members of both houses vote to override.

Good news for you: The Senate passed your bill, and the governor has signed it. Your bill is now a law!