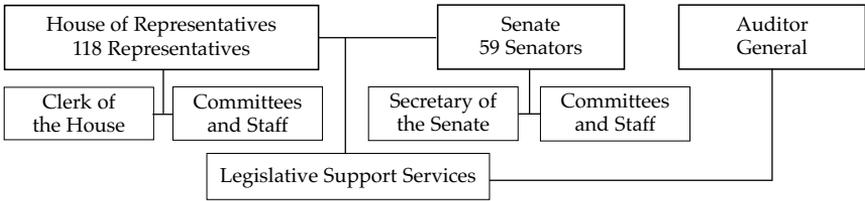


LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

Legislative Organization



To be eligible to serve as a member of the General Assembly, a person must be a United States citizen, at least 21 years old and reside in the district being represented for at least two years prior to the election or appointment.

Functions & Powers

The legislative power of the state of Illinois is vested in the General Assembly, which is composed of a 59-member Senate and a 118-member House of Representatives. Its principal activities are enacting, amending or repealing laws, passing resolutions, adopting appropriation bills and conducting inquiries on proposed legislation. It also acts on amendments to the U.S. Constitution when they are submitted by Congress, and proposes and submits amendments to the Illinois Constitution for consideration by voters. In addition to legislative responsibilities, the Senate is constitutionally delegated the responsibility of advising and consenting on most gubernatorial appointments to state offices, boards and commissions.

The General Assembly may impeach and convict executive and judicial officeholders in the state of Illinois. The House of Representatives has the sole power of impeachment, while the Senate serves as adjudicator. If a majority of the members of the House vote to impeach, the case proceeds to the Senate for trial. No officeholder may be convicted and removed from office without a two-thirds guilty vote from the Senate. The Senate may not, however, impose any punishment on an impeached and convicted officeholder other than removal from office.

Organization & Composition

Each legislative district is composed of one Senate district, which is divided into two Representative districts (see maps on pages 51-52). Every two years, one representative is elected from each Representative district for a two-year term.

Members of the General Assembly are elected at the general election in even-numbered years. Senate districts are divided into three groups, and one or two groups are elected every two years. Senators from one group are elected for terms of four years, four years and two years; another group serves for terms of four years, two years and four years; and the third group is elected for terms of two years, four years and four years.

In January of the odd-numbered year following the November general election, the secretary of state presides over the House until the members have elected a speaker. In the Senate, the governor presides until the members have elected a president. Various other leaders and officers are selected by the speaker and president as well as minority leaders in both the House and Senate to serve in leadership positions. The General Assembly establishes committees and commissions to concentrate on specific subject areas for the consideration of bills.

Legislative Cycle

The General Assembly convenes each year on the second Wednesday in January. The governor's State of the State address to the legislature is delivered early in the session.

Constitutional provisions, formal rules and parliamentary procedures provide basic guidelines and relative stability to both chambers as the General Assembly acts on legislation. Any bill passed after May 31 cannot take effect until June 1 of the following year unless the bill passes both the House and Senate by a three-fifths vote. The General Assembly adjourns at the end of May and reconvenes for two weeks in October or November to consider the governor's vetoes.

At other times, special sessions may be convened by the governor or a joint proclamation by the presiding officers of both chambers. This proclamation confines legislative deliberation to specific subjects, and no other matters except confirmations of appointments and impeachments may be considered by the General Assembly.

How a Bill is Passed

The Legislative Reference Bureau drafts legislation based on requests from legislators, constitutional officers and state agencies. A bill may be introduced in either the House or the Senate, and the procedure is almost identical. Each bill must be read on three different days in each chamber before it is passed.

The first reading introduces the bill. After the first reading, the bill is referred to the appropriate committee for review. The second reading allows for amendments. At the time of the third reading, the bill is debated and then voted on. A simple majority is needed for a bill to pass. Bills approved on third reading move to the other chamber to follow the same process.

If the second chamber approves the bill as written, it is sent to the governor. If a bill is amended in the second chamber and then passed, it must return to the chamber where it originated for concurrence. If the second chamber concurs with the changes, it is sent to the governor.

The governor may sign the bill into law, veto it with recommendations for changes, veto it absolutely or allow it to become law without his signature. If a bill is vetoed, the General Assembly may override the veto by a three-fifths majority.

For a complete explanation of how a bill becomes law, visit www.ilga.gov.



Illinois Senate chamber.