



The Alabama Legislature

Regular Legislative Sessions

The Alabama Legislature convenes annually in Montgomery. Regular legislative sessions are limited to 30 legislative meeting days during 105 calendar days.

Following an election, the Legislature convenes in an organizational session on the second Tuesday in January. Because the terms of both the Senators and Representatives begin and end at the same time, the members must reorganize the Legislature every four years or each “quadrennium.” During this session, the respective houses establish their “General Rules of Order and Procedure.” The senate elects a President pro tem and the House elects a Speaker of the House.

Following the organizational session, the regular session begins on the third Tuesday in April. During the second and third years of the quadrennium, the Legislature convenes on the first Tuesday of February. The fourth year of the quadrennium, also the election year, the regular session convenes on the second Tuesday in January.

Special Sessions

The Governor has the authority to convene the Legislature in special session. There is no limit to the number of special sessions the Governor may call in a calendar year. However, a special session is limited to 12 legislative meeting days during 30 calendar days.

Elected Members

There are 105 members of the Alabama House of Representatives and 35 members of the Alabama Senate. Members of the House and the Senate are elected to four-year terms. Representatives must be 21 years of age at the time of their election to serve and citizens of the state for three years and residents of the district they will represent. Senators must meet the same criteria, except that they must be at least 25 years of age.

Leadership

The leader and presiding officer of the House of Representatives is the Speaker, or in the case of his absence, the Speaker Pro Tem. In the Senate, the Lieutenant Governor is the leader and presiding officer. Although the Lt. Governor presides over the Senate, he or she does not have the right to vote in Senate proceedings except in the event of a tie. The President Pro Tem presides over the Senate in the absence of the Lt. Governor.

Committees

The committees for the House of Representatives are appointed by the presiding officer while the committees for the Senate are dually appointed by the Lt. Governor and President Pro Tem. There are 23 standing committees in the Alabama Senate and 29 standing committees in the House of Representatives.

Voting Procedure

The House of Representatives uses an electronic voting machine (green-yes, red-no) while the Senate uses voice votes.



Tracking a Bill

First Reading

Bill is introduced and “read” for the first time. At this time, the bill is read by title only, unless a member calls for the reading of it in full. The Speaker of the House or the President of the Senate then refers the bill to a committee.

Committee Action

The bill is now in the confines of the committee and the chairman may choose to place the bill on a committee meeting agenda or not. If the bill does get placed on an agenda, the committee considers and studies the bill, receives testimony and hears from interested parties.

Committee alternatives are:

1. Give the bill a “Favorable Report.”
2. Give the bill a “Favorable Report with Amendments.”
3. Substitute the bill. This is a form of amendment, but the substitute must retain the original purpose of the bill.
4. Carry the bill over. This delays action on the bill until another committee meeting.
5. “Indefinitely Postpone” the bill (kill the bill).
6. Take no action on the bill. This eventually kills the bill.

Second Reading

If a bill is reported out of committee, it receives a “second reading.” It is then placed on the House or Senate calendar in anticipation for its third reading.

Third Reading

When a bill is called for its third reading, the full body debates the legislation. The bill may be amended or substituted on the floor. Upon termination of debate, the question of final passage is voted on. If the necessary majority of members present and voting vote favorably, the bill is passed.

Transmittal to the Opposite Chamber

The bill is signed by the Clerk of the House or Clerk of the Senate and sent to the opposite chamber. The process begins again in the opposite chamber. If the opposite chamber passes the bill, but makes changes to the content, a Conference Committee is appointed to work out the differences between the two versions of the bill. The Conference Committee is composed of three members of each chamber. If either chamber refuses to adopt the Conference Committee report, a motion may be made to send the bill back for further negotiations. Should agreement never be reached on the measure, the bill is lost.

Governor’s Signature

When the bill has passed both houses, it is “enrolled” with all the changes and sent to the Governor’s office. The Governor has the following options:

1. Sign the bill and enact it into law.
2. Allow the bill to become law without his or her signature. If the bill has not been returned to the house in which it originated within six days, Sundays excepted, it becomes law without his or her signature.

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3. Send the bill back to the Legislature with an executive amendment. Both bodies must approve the amendment for the bill to become law or vote to override the amendment.
4. Veto the bill.
5. Pocket veto the bill. Bills that reach the Governor less than five days before the end of the session must be approved within ten days after adjournment. Bills that are not approved within that time do not become law.

Overriding a Veto

If both houses cannot agree to the amendments proposed by the Governor, or if the Governor proposes no amendments, the bill may be passed by a vote of a majority of members elected to each house, notwithstanding the Governor's veto.