



Clark County Law Library



Public Laws & Bills

While an idea for legislation may come from any source, it must be introduced to one of the houses of the legislature by a member of Congress in order to become a law.

New legislation may be introduced as a proposal in one of four forms: a bill, joint resolution, concurrent resolution, or simple resolution.

Bills - There are two types of bills: public and private. A public bill affects the general public at large. A bill that affects a single, specific individual or private entity is a private bill.

Bills may originate in either the House or the Senate. The letters "H.R." indicate that a bill originated in the House of Representatives. The letter "S" indicates that a bill began in the Senate. Each house of Congress has a separate numbering sequence for bills.

Bill numbers are found in the legislative history notes at the end of each public law, by searching www.Congress.gov, or a database such as LexisAdvance or WestlawNext.

Bills may be reintroduced each Congress if they did not pass during the previous Congress.

Each Congress lasts 2 years and is comprised of two sessions lasting one year each. Bills that do not pass in the first session carry over into the second. The First Congress under the Constitution was held from 1789 to 1790.

A bill will become a law only after both houses agree to it in identical form and:

1. The President approves it; or
2. If the President fails to return it with objections to the House that originated it within 10 days while Congress is in session; or
3. If both houses override a presidential veto by a two-thirds vote of each House.

A bill does not become law without the President's signature if Congress, by their final adjournment, prevents its return with objections. This is known as a "pocket veto".

Veto messages by the President may be found online under Executive Communications at www.Congress.gov.

After a Bill Becomes Law - Public laws are acts passed by Congress, and are either signed by the President or passed by a vote overriding a presidential veto. The Government Printing Office (GPO) prints these laws, assigning Public Law (P.L.) numbers as they are received.

These numbers reflect both the session and the law number. For example, P.L. 104-340 refers to the 340th Public Law enacted by the 104th Congress. Printed copies of public laws are found in the United States Code Congressional and Administrative News or through the WestlawNext and LexisAdvance databases at the Law Library.

Public laws are later codified in the United States Code (U.S.C.) and reprinted in the United States Code Annotated (U.S.C.A.). Tables at the end of each set provide cross-references between Public Laws and U.S. Codes. Code sections are often indicated in the margin of the public law. The United States Code can also be found online at <http://uscode.house.gov>.

Additional information about bills and the legislative process may be found online at www.Congress.gov.