New to the legislative process? This document aims to provide tools for engaged citizens to access the lawmaking process and stay involved throughout Colorado’s legislative session.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION BASICS

- The annual session is constitutionally mandated to meet for 120 days between January and May. They must convene no later than the second Wednesday of January and adjourn “sine die” (term to denote the final day) 120 days after.
- Each legislator may introduce five bills and must get approval from leadership for additional bills.
- The GAVEL (Give a Vote to Every Legislator) rule means that every introduced bill is required to have a committee hearing where the legislators consider and vote on the bill.
- Nonprofit organizations, industry groups, and individuals with lived expertise often generate bill concepts and can be big players in the process to help pass or kill bills.
- **Lobbying**: Communicating with decision makers about existing or potential legislation and urging a vote in favor or against the legislation.
- **Advocacy**: Sharing a personal story, encouraging civic engagement, volunteering, public education, providing data or information to elected officials.

COLORADO GENERAL ASSEMBLY STRUCTURE

The General Assembly consists of 100 members—35 Senators and 65 Representatives. In 2023, there are 23 Democrats and 12 Republicans in the Senate, and 46 Democrats and 19 Republicans in the House of Representatives. There are 50 men and 50 women in the legislature, and 32 “freshmen” legislators who just completed their first legislative session.

Senators serve four-year terms, while Representatives serve two-year terms. All members are limited to serving for eight consecutive years in their chamber—four terms for Representatives and two terms for Senators. As of the 2020 census, each Senator serves an average of 164,693 residents and each Representative serves an average of 88,826 residents.
The Executive Leadership of the House includes the Speaker, Majority Leader, Assistant Majority Leader, Minority Leader, and Assistant Minority Leader. On the Senate side, there is the Senate President, President Pro Tempore, Majority Leader, Assistant Majority Leader, Minority Leader and Assistant Minority Leader. The Speaker and President positions are elected by the majority vote of their chamber, while the Majority and Minority Leader positions are chosen by their respective caucuses.

There is also a Majority and Minority Whip for both chambers whose role it is to ensure discipline within their respective parties, and a Caucus Chair for each chamber. For the House majority party, there are two Co-Whips and Caucus Co-Chairs while the minority party has one of each.

Do you know your legislators? If not, use the tool below to find out who represents you and how to contact them. You can also learn about their occupation, party, committee assignments, and bills.

FIND MY LEGISLATOR
A bill begins by being introduced to either the Senate or House, where it is assigned a bill number, official title, and is referred to a committee. Each committee is composed of several members that focus on a particular subject area, such as agriculture and natural resources, health and human services, housing and local government, education, and more. In the committee hearing, the legislators leading the bill (the sponsors) present the bill and the floor is opened for public testimony. Testimony gives community members the opportunity to speak to the committee, usually for 2-3 minutes, to educate and persuade them on a piece of legislation. Testimony usually highlights stories from personal experience or expertise and/or compelling data points.

After hearing testimony, the committee votes on whether to send a bill to the floor of that chamber (unless the bill will cost money, in which case it will first be sent to a committee on appropriations), where it is voted on by all members of the chamber in a second and then third reading. The second reading includes discussion and amendments to the bill, whereas the third reading is usually more brief and includes an official vote. If the chamber votes to pass that piece of legislation, it heads over to the other chamber where it goes through the same process of committee hearing, second reading, and third reading. If any amendments are made by the second chamber, the chamber of origin must vote to concur (or a conference committee must convene to find a compromise) before the bill is officially passed and sent to the Governor for a signature.

The State of Colorado provides live audio and video for the majority of the legislature’s meetings during session for those looking to tune in. Committee hearings can be followed with live audio and floor proceedings of the House and Senate have both audio and live video.
1ST CHAMBER

INTRODUCTION, 1ST READING & COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENT → COMMITTEE HEARING → APPROPRIATIONS IF THE BILL HAS A FISCAL NOTE (COSTS $$) → SECOND READING → THIRD READING

2ND CHAMBER

If the bill passes through committee hearing and second and third readings on the floor, it moves to the second chamber. Here it will go through the same process as in the first chamber.

If the bill is passed in the second chamber with amendments, it returns to the chamber of origin, where they choose to accept or reject the amendments.

- If the bill is passed in the second chamber without amendments...
  - ACCEPT
  - REJECT

GOVERNOR

The Governor can sign the bill into the law, veto, or let it become law without signing.

The bill heads to a conference committee composed of members of both the House and Senate to negotiate.

- AGREEMENT
  - NO AGREEMENT

If the bill doesn’t pass any of these steps, it is considered “dead” and is lost. The sponsors can also move to postpone indefinitely or “PI” the bill, which has the same effect as killing the measure.

DEAD