

HOW BILLS BECOME LAW IN NEBRASKA

The legislative process in Nebraska is unique compared to other states. Knowing the basics of how a bill becomes a law in Nebraska will help guide you as you decide how to use your story to advocate for change.



The Unicameral

Most states have two legislative bodies, a Senate and a House of Representatives, who make the laws for that state. Unlike other states, Nebraska's legislature is a **unicameral**, meaning it only has one legislative body: the **Senate**. The Senate works on Nebraska's state laws, not national-level (federal) laws.



Legislative Session

A **legislative session** is a period of 60 days (during even numbered years) or 90 days (during odd numbered years) during which **state senators** meet to do business such as changing, updating, and passing new laws.

Legislative bills, also referred to as **LB** or a **bill**, are proposals for changing existing laws or passing new laws that are considered by the state **Legislature** (all the state senators).

A **sponsoring or introducing senator** is the state senator who introduces a bill to be considered by the Legislature, in hopes that it will become law. Sometimes other state senators will add their name as a **co-sponsor**, to show that they also support the bill.



Committees

Each bill is referred to a **committee** of state senators based upon the subject of the bill. One of the committee members will be selected as a **Chairperson** to lead and direct the work of the committee. There are 14 standing committees.

All bills assigned to committees will have a **public committee hearing**. A hearing is a scheduled time when the committee hears from the sponsoring senator and the public about the bill. The public can give spoken testimony about the bill or attend simply to watch. All public hearings are livestreamed on the internet, broadcast on public television and transcribed word for word to ensure accuracy and future review.

Anyone can provide testimony at a committee hearing. **Testimony** is a person's written or verbal statement offered to the committee at a hearing. Someone testifying in support of a bill at the committee hearing is called a **proponent** and someone testifying against a bill is called an **opponent**. A person can also testify neither for or against a bill, and this is called testifying in a **neutral capacity**.

After the hearing, state senators talk over all the information they received and the testimony they heard on each bill during **executive session**. State senators can vote to advance the bill to the full

Legislature for debate, indefinitely postpone, or take no action at all which will leave the bill ‘in committee’ until action is taken. If the committee re-writes or changes this bill, this is called a **committee amendment**.

A bill that is **voted out of committee** means the committee has decided they support the bill and want all state senators to have an opportunity to talk about the bill and debate it **on the floor** of the Legislature, where all the state senators gather to debate, discuss, and vote on bills.



Debate

After a bill has been voted out of committee, it will have to pass three rounds of debate by the full Legislature and receive at least a simple majority of votes in support (25 votes) to advance. The first round of debate by all the state senators is called **General File**, the second round is called **Select File**, and the last round is called **Final Reading**. On General File and Select File, bills can be **amended** (changed).

A bill on **Final Reading** is voted on by state senators without debate and cannot be amended. To make amendments (changes), it must be returned to Select File. If the bill is voted forward from Final Reading, it goes to the governor for consideration and signature.



Governor's Decision

The **governor** has five days, excluding Sundays, to decide what to do with a bill. If the governor signs a bill or declines to act on it in those five days, the bill becomes a **state law**. The governor may also veto a bill. The Legislature may choose to vote to override any veto from the governor, although it takes a vote of 30 out of 49 state senators to do so.

Sometimes bills do not make it all the way through the process to become law during a legislative session. There could be a lot of reasons for this, such as running out of time or not being able to agree to the bill as it is written.

Resources

- List of Senators: https://nebraskalegislature.gov/senators/senator_list.php
- Search for a Bill: <https://nebraskalegislature.gov/bills/>
- List of Committees: <https://nebraskalegislature.gov/committees/committees.php>
- Search for a Hearing: https://nebraskalegislature.gov/calendar/hearings_range.php
- Hearing Livestream: <http://netnebraska.org/basic-page/television/live-demand-state-government>
- Lawmaking in Nebraska: <https://nebraskalegislature.gov/about/lawmaking.php>
- How a Bill Becomes a Law in Nebraska Video: <https://strongnebraska.org/>

“How Bills Become Law in Nebraska” is part of *Survivors Speak: How to share your story to advocate for legislative change in Nebraska*. For more information about how you can share your story to advocate for change, check out the full guide at <https://survivorsrisingomaha.org/survivors-speak/>. Please do not reproduce or alter without express written permission from Survivors Rising.