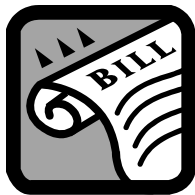


might be gained under the provisions of each bill. This statement is called a fiscal note. In addition, the fiscal office prepares appropriations bills, which go along with bills that cost money or raise funds.



With the exception of a few bills making minor corrections, most bills introduced into the Legislature must receive a public hearing by a legislative committee. A nine-member Reference Committee determines which bills will be heard by each of the 14 standing committees. At hearings, citizens have a chance to express their opinions to committee members. Their comments are recorded, transcribed and become part of the official committee record. After the hearing, committees may vote to send a bill to General File with or without amendments, indefinitely postpone (kill) the bill or take no action on it.

## Step 2: General File

General File is the first time the full Legislature has the opportunity to debate and vote on bills. At this stage, senators consider amendments, which may be proposed by committees and by individual senators. Many people consider General File to be the most important stage of the legislative process because it is where most compromises are worked out through debate and amendment. It takes a majority vote of the Legislature (25 votes) to adopt amendments, and to move a bill from General File to the next stage of consideration, Select File. If a bill is filibustered (i.e., endlessly debated) 33 votes are required to stop debate and move to a vote on the bill.

## Step 3: Select File

Select File is the second debating and voting stage. This step allows another opportunity for amendment, compromise and reflection. Bills on Select File may be killed or advanced to the next stage, Final Reading with a majority vote (25 votes).

## Step 4: Final Reading

The Nebraska Constitution requires that before a final vote, all bills must be read aloud in their entirety by the Clerk of the Legislature, unless three-fifths (30 members) of the Legislature votes not to do so. A bill may not be amended or debated on Final Reading, but may be returned to Select File for a specific amendment with a majority vote (25 votes). Bills may not be voted on for final passage until at least five legislative days after the bill is introduced, and one legislative day after it is placed on Final Reading. It takes 25 votes to pass a regular bill on Final Reading and send it to the Governor.

A proposed constitutional amendment requires a three-fifths vote of the elected members (30) to place it on the general election ballot in November and a four-fifths vote (40) to place it on a primary (May) or special election ballot. A bill with an emergency clause (see "Effective Date") requires a vote of two-thirds (33 members) of the Legislature.

## Step 5: Governor

After the Legislature passes a bill on Final Reading, it goes to the governor. The governor has five days, excluding Sundays, to sign a bill or declines, let it become law without his signature, or veto a bill. He/she also has the authority to strike specific budget items (line-item veto). The Legislature may override a governor's veto, although it takes a vote of 30 senators to do so.

## Effective Date

Most bills passed and approved by the governor become law three calendar months after the Legislature adjourns for the year. However, bills may take effect before that date if they contain the emergency clause.

## 2009 NEBRASKA LEGISLATIVE MEMBERSHIP

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## How a Bill Becomes Law in Nebraska

### Lawmaking in the Unicameral

The lawmaking process in Nebraska officially begins when a senator introduces a bill into the Legislature. The Legislature, or legislative cycle, consists of 2 consecutive sessions, each beginning in January. The first session lasts 90 days and the second session lasts 60 days.



But the process actually begins much earlier--when a senator develops ideas for new laws. An idea for a new law may be suggested by anyone: *concerned citizens, special interest groups, state agencies* or the *governor*. But the idea **must** be introduced as a bill by a senator to be formally considered by the Legislature.

*Here are the steps a bill must take before becoming a Nebraska state law:*

### Step I: Introducing a Bill

First, a senator and his or her staff research a problem and study possible solutions. Legislative committees also study a variety of issues that have been previously identified by the Legislature. A senator may introduce a bill to create a new law, or to get rid of or change an existing law. A senator brings his or her idea for a new law to a bill drafter, who works with the senator to transform the idea into the proper legal form for a bill. Unlike some states, bills in Nebraska may contain only one subject.

Most bills are introduced during the first 10 days of the legislative session beginning each January. In order to introduce a bill, a senator files it with the *Clerk of the Legislature*. The clerk reads the title of the bill into the record, assigns it a number and prints copies of it for public and legislative use.

The *Legislative Fiscal Office* prepares budget statements to tell senators how much money might be spent or how much revenue