

# What Does it Take for a Bill to Become a Law in Hawaii?

It takes quite a lot, and becoming a law may take a while! About 90% of bills don't become law, and ideas may have to be presented year after year before they gain traction and move forward. Bills can only be introduced during legislative session. They advance through their originating chamber, crossover to the other, and then are finalized for presentation to the Governor.

Here's what it takes for a bill to become law\*:



- **Be introduced by a legislator (Representative or Senator)**

In Hawaii, only legislators (51 Representatives, 25 Senators) can introduce bills, and they have a limited time during the legislative session in which to do so (usually just the first week).



COMMITTEE HEARINGS

- **Successfully pass through all the committees the House and Senate leadership refer it to**

Each bill is referred to one or more committees soon after it is introduced, and upon crossing over to the other chamber. To pass and move forward, it must be scheduled to be "heard" and decided on by the committees. (If it doesn't get heard and passed, it dies. Be sure to let the committee chair know if you want a hearing held!) The public hearing is when formal public testimony on the bill can be offered. Once a hearing is scheduled, you can submit testimony, encourage others to do the same, and even come and testify in person or over Zoom.



FLOOR VOTES

- **Successfully pass three votes ("readings") in both the House and Senate chambers (where the members convene)**

- 1) Just about everything passes the First Reading (vote), which takes place right away.
  - 2) The Second Reading usually takes place before a bill heads to its last committee.
  - 3) Third Reading takes place after the bill has made it through the committees. On occasion, you may see a lot of debate on the chamber floor when a bill is up for its Third Reading.
- All members vote on the legislation -- so don't forget to contact your own Representative and Senator!



FINAL AGREEMENT

- **Have both the House and Senate agree on its exact wording**

A bill can die even *after* it has successfully made it through all its committees and three readings in each chamber! A conference committee may be assigned to come up with the wording all can agree on. While testimony isn't accepted at this stage, you can let legislators know what you consider acceptable or unacceptable in terms of the final bill. The final version must be voted on by each chamber.



ENACTMENT

- **Be signed or allowed to become law by the Governor, or have the House and Senate successfully override the Governor's veto (if vetoed, need 2/3 of each chamber to vote to override in order for bill to become law)**

After a bill has successfully passed through the legislature, it still needs to be enacted. Make sure you let the Governor know your position, and offer information to help sway the decision on whether to sign the bill, allow it to become law, or veto it. If vetoed, there's an opportunity for the House and Senate to override -- it's a high bar, but it has been done.



DEADLINES

- **It must do all of this while adhering to strict legislative deadlines!**

The legislative process is tied into the session calendar which is produced in December or early January each year. Once session starts on the third Wednesday in January, things move quickly! A bill has to keep moving forward, or it will be left behind and miss crucial deadlines. Who holds the most power over the fate of your bill will change along the way. Effective advocacy often involves educating lawmakers and stakeholders, and working towards a common solution. Learn how to help advocate for (or against) measures -- contact the Public Access Room (PAR) for a workshop, over-the-phone tutorial, teaching materials, and useful handouts.

\* This is a broad overview -- for more detail and exceptions, contact the Public Access Room.