

HOW A BILL BECOMES

A LAW

BILL

A proposal to create a new law, or to change or repeal an existing one.

In Canada's Parliament, bills may originate in either of its two houses – the Senate and the House of Commons. Most legislation begins in the House of Commons, where bills are assigned the letter "C" and a number (e.g. C-201). Bills that are introduced in the Senate are given the letter "S" and a number (e.g. S-201).

Regardless of where a bill originates, it must be passed by both houses in identical form before it can receive Royal Assent and become law.

THIS IS HOW A SENATE BILL GOES THROUGH PARLIAMENT:

FIRST READING

- ▶ The bill is received in the Senate Chamber and copies are given to senators.
- ▶ This provides senators with the chance to see what issues are being addressed, although the merits of the bill are not yet debated.

SECOND READING

- ▶ Senators debate the scope of the bill.
- ▶ Generally, it cannot be amended at this stage.
- ▶ If it passes a vote, it is sent to a Senate committee for further review.

COMMITTEE STAGE

- ▶ Senators call experts and people who may be affected by the bill to provide analysis and insight.
- ▶ Committee members study the bill in detail, clause by clause.
- ▶ Committee members may make amendments to the bill at this stage.
- ▶ The committee adopts a report on the bill, with or without amendments.
- ▶ The report is sent to the full Senate for consideration.

COMMITTEE REPORT STAGE

- ▶ The committee report, if it recommends amendments, is considered by the whole Senate (i.e. by all 105 senators).
- ▶ Senators can propose further amendments.
- ▶ Debate focuses on these amendments.

THIRD READING

- ▶ Senators can propose amendments.
- ▶ Senators vote on the bill and its amendments.
- ▶ If it passes, the bill is sent to the House of Commons, where it goes through a similar process.

SENT TO HOUSE OF COMMONS

If the Senate amends a bill from the House of Commons, or vice versa, both chambers exchange messages until they agree on the final text of the bill.

ROYAL ASSENT

Once passed by both chambers in identical form, a bill becomes law when the Monarch or designate – usually the governor general – grants Royal Assent. Royal Assent can be given in the Senate Chamber or at Rideau Hall, the governor general's residence.

