

DC OFFICE OF THE TENANT ADVOCATE:
HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

1. A legislative idea can come from anyone, but only a Councilmember may **introduce** a bill at the Council. The Councilmember may do so with the support of Council colleagues who become either co-introducers (whose names will appear on the bill) or co-sponsors.
2. The Chairman of the Council refers the "**Introduction**" to the Committee or Committees with the relevant jurisdiction (there are now ten (10) Committees other than the Committee of the Whole. The Chairman may also refer the bill to another committee or committees for comment.
3. If the Committee Chairperson decides to take action on the introduction, the public must be given notice and an opportunity to comment on the bill at a **public hearing** or roundtable.
4. Notices of Council hearings and roundtables are published in the D.C. Register at <http://www.dcregs.org/>.
5. After the hearing or roundtable, the Committee may take no action or it may disapprove the bill at a Committee meeting, which effectively ends the legislative process. Or the Committee may approve the bill as introduced or amend it at a Committee "**mark-up**" meeting.
6. The "marked up" bill is called the "**Committee Print**" and must be included in a "**Committee Report**" that explains the rationale for the bill. The Committee then submits the approved Print and Report to the full Council.
7. Before the full Council may consider the bill, the Committee of the Whole must agendaize the bill for a legislative session. The Council Chairman may place the bill on the "**consent agenda**," which allows the Council to approve the bill at the next legislative session without discussion. Upon any Councilmember's request, the bill will be placed on the "**non-consent agenda**," so that the Council may debate the bill and consider any proposed amendments.

8. In order to be enacted, the full Council must vote to approve the bill *twice* at separate legislative sessions that take place at least fourteen (14) days apart. If approved at "first reading," the bill is "**engrossed**" to reflect any amendments at first reading; if approved at "second reading," the bill is "**enrolled**" to reflect any amendments at second reading.
9. After approval on second reading, the Council will transmit the bill to the Mayor, who may veto the bill, sign the bill, or return the bill to the Council without action.
10. A super-majority of the Council may over-ride the Mayor's veto. If the Council does so, or if the Mayor signs the bill or returns it without action, then the bill becomes a "**D.C. Act.**"
11. Except in the case of emergency legislation, however, ***an Act is still not yet law.*** This is due to the fact that the District -- unlike any State -- has **limited Home Rule**. Upon granting the District limited home rule in 1973, the U.S. Congress retained ultimate authority to approve or disapprove D.C. Acts.
12. The Congress exercises this authority over District law through a 60-day "passive review" period for criminal matters and a 30-day "passive review" period for all other matters. If the Congress takes no action within the "passive review" period, then the bill finally becomes a "**DC Law.**"

Please note:

An **emergency bill** only requires one (1) vote and is not subject to a hearing or Congressional review. Once approved by the Mayor, an emergency measure becomes an **Emergency Act** and is effective "law" for only 90 days.

A **temporary bill** requires two (2) votes and is subject to Congressional review, but is not subject to a hearing. Once approved, a temporary measure becomes a **Temporary Law** and is effective law for 225 days.

The Council Secretary assigns to any Bill, Act, or Law a tracking number beginning with the current Council period (e.g., B20-xxx, A20-xxx, L20-xxx for current Council Period 20).

If you have questions about the District's legislative process or any tenant or rental housing legislation, please feel free to contact the OTA's Legislative Director Joel Cohn at (202) 719-6568 or joel.cohn@dc.gov.