

## North Carolina General Assembly Primer

### General Overview

The North Carolina General Assembly is a bicameral legislature, made up of the [House of Representatives](#) and the [Senate](#). The House has 120 members, and the Senate has 50 members. Both chambers have elections every two years, with no term limits. The minimum age to serve as a legislator is 21 for the House and 25 for the Senate.

The General Assembly has two-year sessions, known as a biennium. In odd-numbered years, the General Assembly begins long session, which typically runs January through July. In even-numbered years, session begins in late spring and lasts for several months. The exact schedule for session changes every year, with no set adjournment date. The end of the fiscal year in North Carolina is June 30<sup>th</sup>, and most years the legislature aims to adjourn shortly after that date once they are able to pass a new budget.

### Leadership and Session Schedule

The Speaker of the House presides over the House of Representatives, while the Lieutenant Governor presides as the President of the Senate. The Lieutenant Governor is not allowed to vote, other than to break a tie. Since the Lieutenant Governor's role is primarily ceremonial, the Senate elects a President Pro-Tem, who is the leader of the Senate.

Although North Carolina is considered a part-time legislature, during session the House and Senate usually meet Monday through Thursday. When members are not discussing bills on the chamber floor, they are holding committee meetings. Much of the work on bills is done in committee meetings, and some committee meetings are even held during the interim when the General Assembly is not in session. At the beginning of each biennium, the Speaker of the House and the President Pro-Tem of the Senate assign members to [committees](#) and choose the chairmen.

Throughout session, there are certain self-imposed deadlines that the legislature enacts. For example, a "crossover" deadline is set at the beginning of each session. Crossover is the date by which a bill must have passed through one chamber to be considered in the other chamber. If a bill does not meet the crossover date, it is usually considered dead for the session. Some bills are not subject to crossover, such as bills from Appropriations or Finance committees, or adjournment resolutions. However, there are always loopholes to introducing legislation after crossover. Lawmakers have been known to use a "gut and amend" process, whereby a bill that passed in one chamber is completely re-written by the other chamber to introduce a different piece of legislation.

### How to File Legislation

Only a legislator may sponsor and introduce a bill for consideration in the General Assembly, but anyone is able to propose a new bill or a change to existing law. There can be one first-position primary sponsor

on a bill, and up to three other primary sponsors. Any legislator can sign on as a co-sponsor of a bill. There are five types of laws that the General Assembly can enact or repeal. The five categories include:

1. Laws regulating individual conduct
2. Laws providing for State services
3. Laws empowering or directing local governments
4. Laws determining how much money will be raised by the State and for what purposes it shall be spent
5. Amending the State Constitution

Once a bill is filed, it is introduced on the chamber floor and automatically passes its first reading. Then, the bill gets assigned to committees. As stated above, a large portion of the work on bills is done in committee meetings. This is where bills are debated and changed, and where advocacy groups, stakeholders, or the public may offer input. Bills are changed by members in committees through Proposed Committee Substitutes (PCS) and Amendments. A bill passes a committee once it is given a favorable report, and is often sent to be considered in other committees. All bills make a final stop in the Rules Committee, which either chooses to pass or kill a bill.

Once a bill clears the Rules Committee, it is placed on the calendar to be read for a second time on the chamber floor. This is where sponsors of the bill explain the legislation, and other members can ask questions or state their opinions. Members can also offer amendments to a bill on the chamber floor. Once the debate is over, members must vote on the bill. In most cases, a bill is then immediately read for a third time and could be debated again before the final vote is taken. After a bill has successfully passed through one chamber, it is sent to the other body and must go through the same committee and floor vote process. If the second body makes changes to a bill, it must be sent back to the originating chamber for a vote of concurrence. If the original body objects to any changes made, a conference committee may be created to reconcile differences between the two chambers. The conference committee then reports back to each chamber, and the reconciled bill must be voted on again. If the original body agrees with the changes, the bill is enrolled and sent to the Governor to sign if applicable.

The Governor has limited veto power, and has ten days to take action on a bill. If the bill is not signed by the Governor in ten days, it automatically becomes law. If the Governor vetoes a bill, it returns to the original chamber and three-fifths of members present must vote in favor to override the veto. After a bill becomes law, it is referred to as a Session Law. All Session Laws are found [here](#).

## **Constituents and Legislative Offices**

The public may attend committee meetings and sessions held by the General Assembly. Constituents and stakeholders also frequently meet with legislators to advocate on behalf of an issue. Live [audio recordings](#) of committee meetings are available in most committee rooms and in both chambers, along with access to an online dashboard to track bills during session.

Each legislator has a Legislative Assistant, and some have a Research Assistant to help with additional policy advising and research. A member's Legislative Assistant helps schedule meetings and handles constituent issues. To find the member that represents you, click [here](#). The North Carolina General Assembly [website](#) has many great tools available to help with tracking bills, reading summaries, and keeping up with the legislature's schedule.