

# THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE

By Texas Civil Rights Project



## What is it?

The Texas Legislature is the **lawmaking** body of the state. It is co-equal with the other two branches of state government, the judiciary and executive. The state legislature meets at the Capitol in Austin.

## Who are they?

The legislature is composed of two chambers: the lower chamber, the **House of Representatives**, and the upper chamber, the **Senate**. The House of Representatives is made up of **150** members each serving 2-year terms and is led by the Speaker of the House, who is elected by House members. The Senate has only **31** members who serve 4-year terms and is presided over by the Lieutenant Governor, who is elected by Texas voters. All legislators are elected on a partisan basis by geographic districts and don't have term limits.

### HOUSE

- ★ **150 members**
- ★ **2 year terms**
- ★ **led by Speaker**

Republican  
members

**86**

**64**  
Democratic  
members

### SENATE

- ★ **31 members**
- ★ **4 year terms**
- ★ **led by Lt. Governor**

Republican  
members

**19**

**12**  
Democratic  
members

# What do they do?

The Texas Legislature is responsible for lots of things, including:

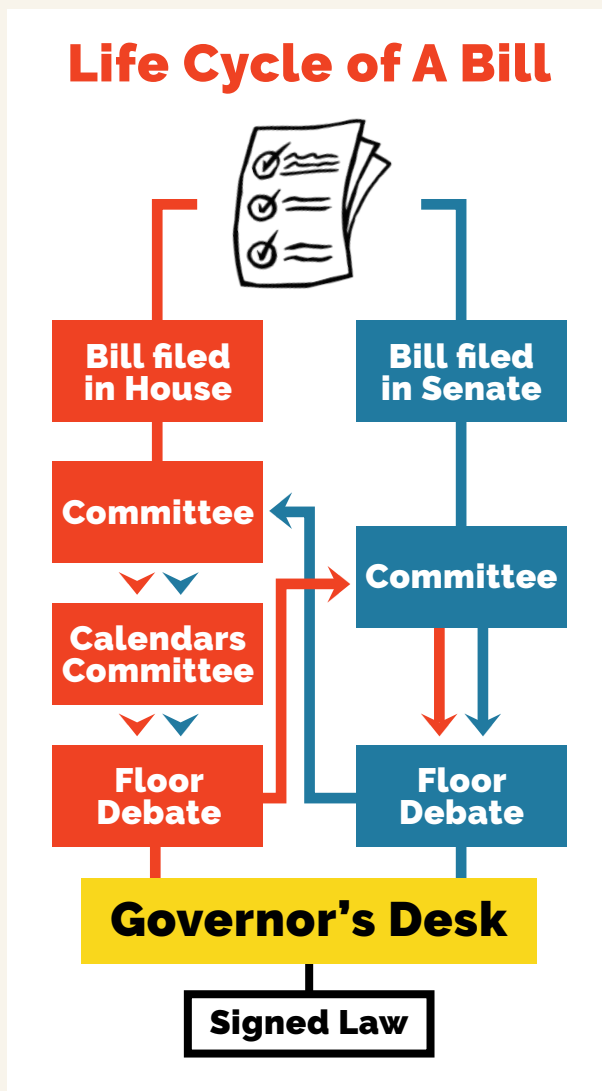
- **Passing and amending state laws**
  - These include the election code, the penal and criminal procedure codes, and laws around education and curriculum requirements. These affect every city and county in Texas, giving the legislature significant power to control important daily activities and procedures across the state.
- **Setting tax rates and approving the state budget**
- **Drawing congressional and legislative maps in the redistricting process every 10 years**
- **Providing oversight of local governments and the other branches of state government**
- **Approving or rejecting appointments made by the governor, including:**
  - State officials like the Secretary of State
  - Members of state boards, commissions, and councils like the Texas Energy Reliability Council, Texas Workforce Commission, and the Boards of Regents at Texas public universities
  - Members of task forces that advise the governor or state agencies on specific issues and policies
  - State elected and judicial offices when the office-holder resigns or dies
- **Impeaching statewide elected officials when applicable**

# When do they meet?

**Regular legislative sessions** are held at the Capitol in Austin in the January of every odd-numbered year and last for 140 days. The governor can call **special sessions** which can last up to 30 days, but the legislature can only consider bills within the governor's agenda for that session.

# How do they pass laws?

The legislature can only pass laws during a legislative session. Many things have to happen before a bill becomes a law, but it generally moves through the following steps:



- 1. Legislator files a bill**
- 2. Referral to the appropriate committee**
- 3. Consideration and approval by committee**
- 4. Consideration by the whole chamber (House or Senate)**
- 5. If passed, the bill is referred to the other chamber**
- 6. Committee and floor action in second chamber**
- 7. Reconciliation of bill versions between both chambers**
- 8. Bill is sent to the governor**

The governor can either sign the bill, which is the final step in enacting a bill into law, or veto the bill. If the governor issues a veto, then the bill will not become law unless a two-thirds vote in each chamber overrides the veto.

Once a law has been passed, it is often set to take effect on September 1 of that year. The legislature can also decide for a bill to take effect earlier with a two-thirds vote in each chamber.

Between regular legislative sessions, committees may be issued directives—called **interim charges**—to study and hold hearings about a particular issue. These charges are often topics of interest to lawmakers or their parties and tend to lay the groundwork for future legislation.

For a more detailed explanation, please visit [the Texas Legislature Online's website](#).

# How to get involved



## During the legislative session

- Call, email, or meet with legislators to urge them to support or oppose specific bills or causes
- Legislative offices are open to the public during business hours, meaning you can stop by anytime and ask to speak with staff, drop off informative materials, etc. Start with your representative and senator, as they listen most closely to their own constituents, but you can also reach out to any other member to make a bigger impact.
- Testify during public committee hearings
  - Register in person at the Capitol on the day of the hearing to speak on, for, or against a bill. Speakers will have 3 minutes or less for testimony, depending on the hearing and committee, and time is doubled for those addressing the committee through a translator. Tips for testifying at the Capitol can be [found here](#)
  - If you can't attend in person, you can usually email written testimony to the committee clerk
- "Drop a card" - register your position on a bill during a public hearing without giving testimony. Must be done in-person at the Capitol
- Submit written comments [online](#) for a bill the day of a public hearing (House only)
- Observe House and Senate floor proceedings in the chamber galleries
- Organize a group to attend when major bills are being considered
  - Wear matching T-shirts or colors to demonstrate popular support for your position
  - Signs, posters, and banners are not allowed in House or Senate chambers but are generally permitted elsewhere at the Capitol, like in the rotunda and outdoors

## Anytime

- Call, email, or meet with your legislators and their staff to encourage their support on an issue
- Organize a protest, rally, or other action inside and outside of the Capitol
- Other ideas: email or social media campaigns, reaching out to local press, letters to the editor, op-eds, etc.

- ★ The Capitol building, House, and Senate have rules regarding permissible actions & behavior at meetings and on Capitol grounds, and these can be found online. Generally, threatening or offensive language, loud booing, yelling, or applause, and any type of physical interruption of meetings & floor proceedings are prohibited and may be grounds for removal or, in some cases, even arrest and prosecution. Familiarizing yourself with these policies and potential consequences can be helpful as you plan your advocacy efforts.
- ★ Remember, your elected officials work for you and it's their job to take their constituents' views and opinions into account when forming public policy.

## Additional Resources

Texas Constitution and Statutes - <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov>

Texas Legislature Online - <https://capitol.texas.gov>

Texas Capitol Resources - <https://tspb.texas.gov/prop/tc/tc/capitol.html>

Capitol Events Request - <https://tspb.texas.gov/plan/events/requests.html>

Know Your Protesters' Rights - <https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/protesters-rights>

## Contact us

We're here to help! Send us an email at [info@texascivilrightsproject.org](mailto:info@texascivilrightsproject.org) if you have more questions about navigating state and local government or making change in your community.