

How a Bill Becomes a Law

Rhode Island's bills may start in either the State Senate or State House of Representatives, which is different from the federal process. For this tutorial, we will start with the State Senate.

Introduction of a Bill

A bill is drafted either by or on behalf of a senator to introduce. This senator is called the bill's prime sponsor.

Additional senators are invited to sign on as co-sponsors of the bill.

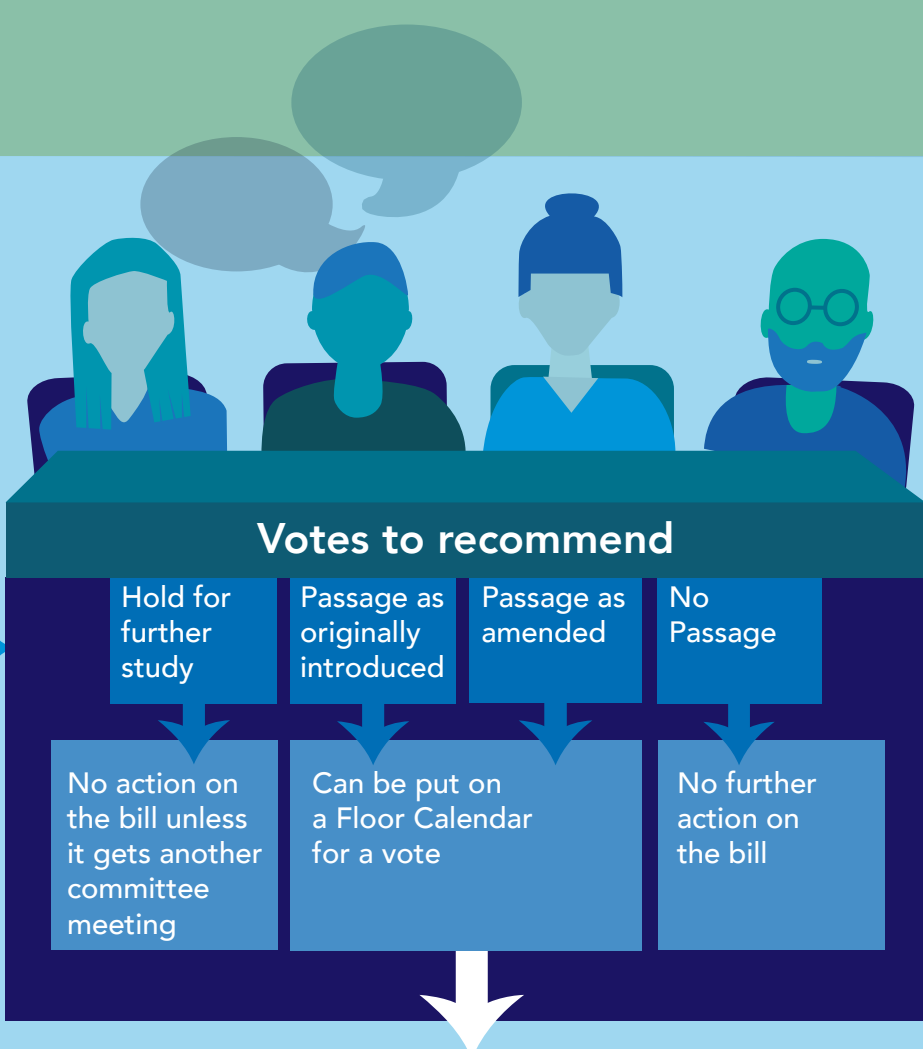
Once the bill is introduced in the senate chamber, it is assigned a committee.



Senate Committee Actions

The Committee Phase of the bill's journey is when the public has the most direct input by either testifying, providing written testimony, or signing up in support or opposition of the bill. Most, but not all, committee meetings have time for public testimony. Most amendments to a bill happen while in committee. When amended, the bill receives a "Sub A" as part of its number.

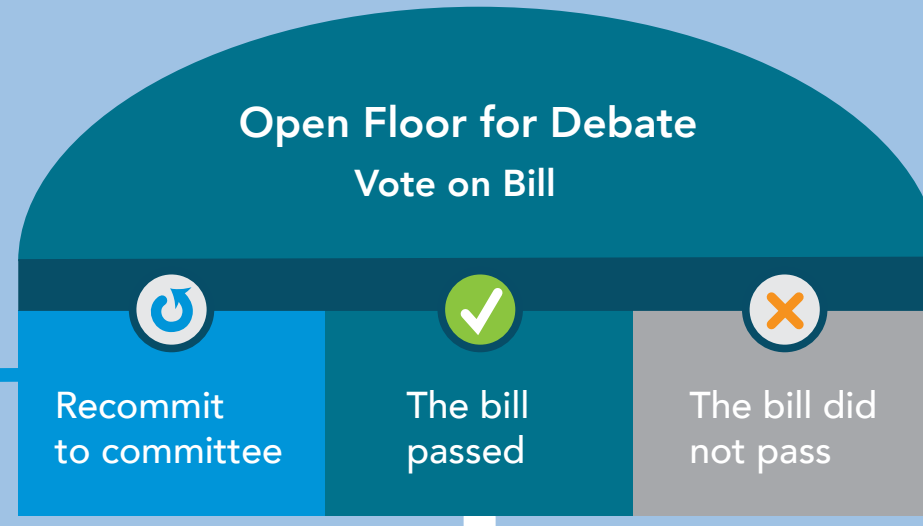
There is no time requirement from when a bill is introduced to when it is put on a committee calendar. Once the committee feels the bill is complete, it will vote on a recommendation for the next step.



Senate Chamber

The bill arrives in the Senate Chamber. Members ask questions, make statements, and debate about the full bill. Once debate is completed, the Senate votes on the bill.

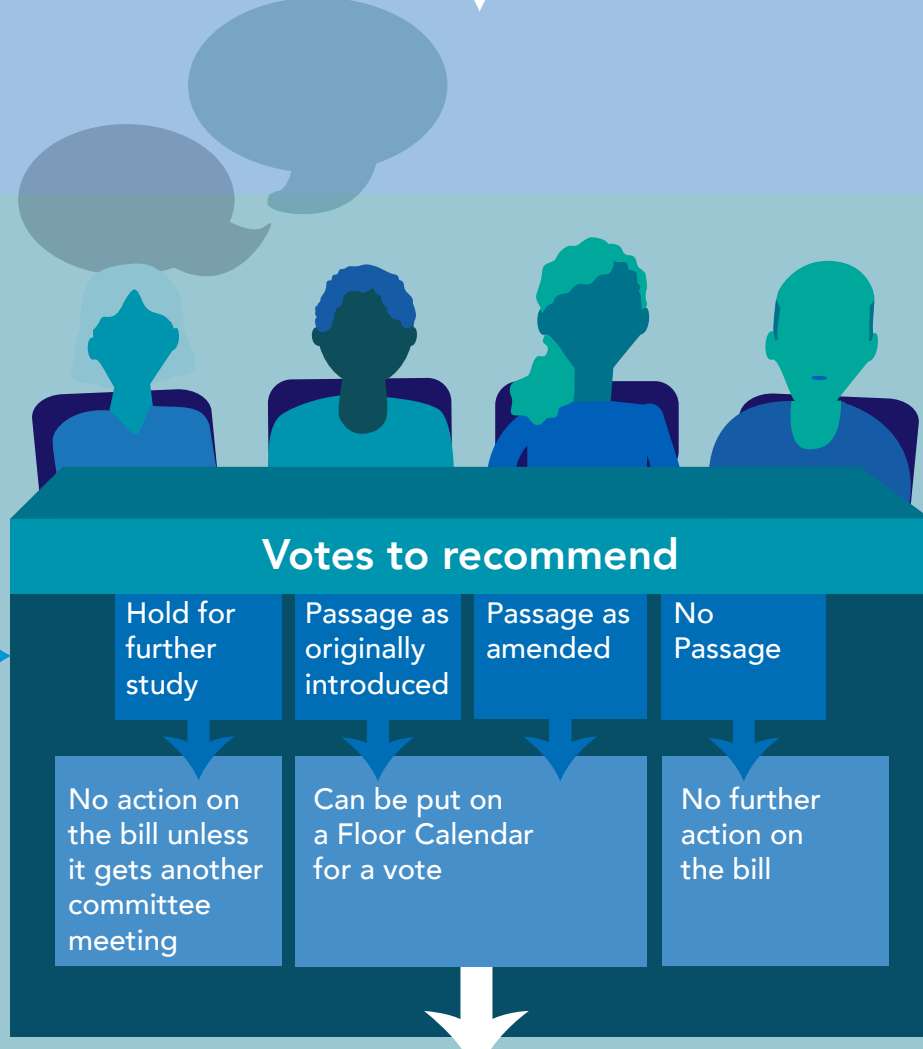
Bills might be amended on the Senate floor. In this case, the Senate will vote for the amendment after it is debated. If the amendment does not pass, it will not be included on the bill. A bill with a floor amendment has a "Sub Aaa" after the bill number to indicate it was changed on the floor.



House Committee Actions

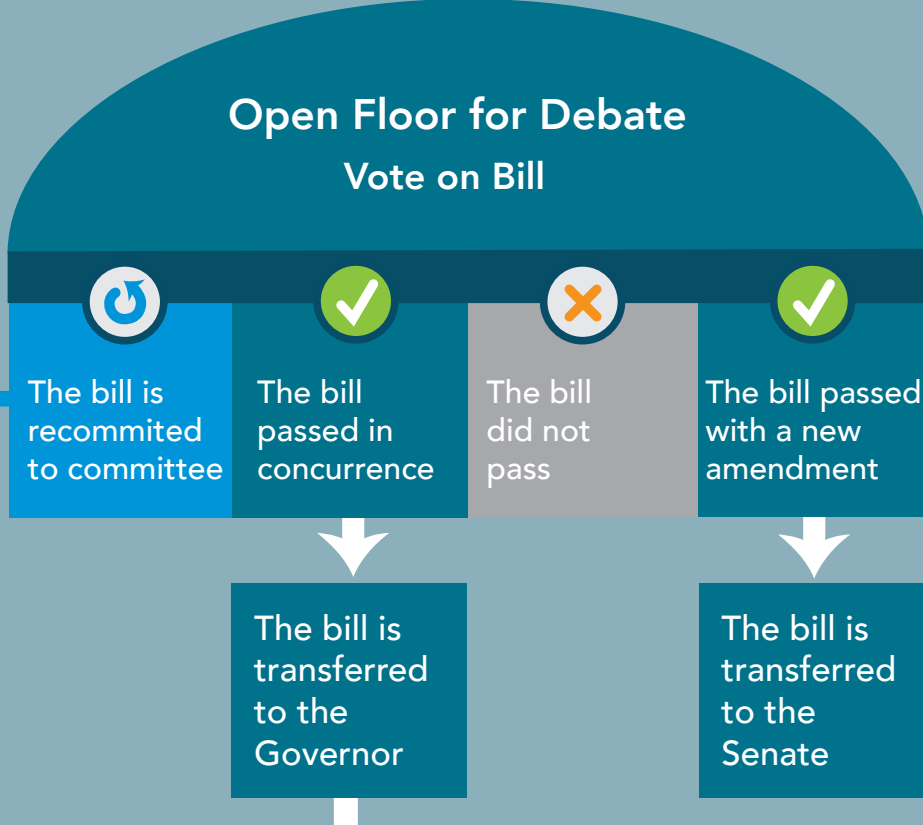
The bill is then transferred to the House of Representatives and assigned to one of its committees.

Once the bill is put on a committee calendar, it goes through a nearly identical process as its first committee phase. Again, the public is able to have direct input on the bill.



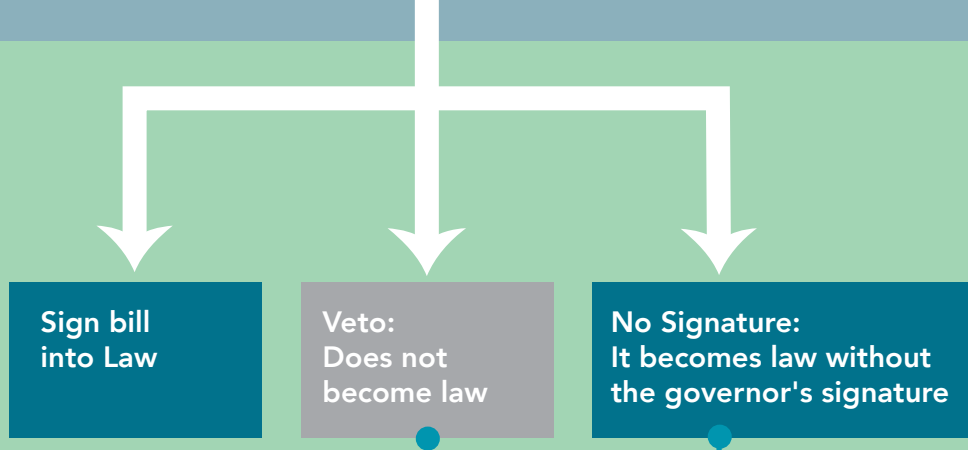
House Chamber

If the House committee does not make any changes to the bill, and the House passes the bill in concurrence, it goes onto the governor. However, if they make any amendments to the bill either as a floor amendment or in committee, it will need to go back to the Senate, so both chambers pass the exact same version of the bill.



Governor

The Governor has three options when receiving a bill that has passed both the Senate and House of Representatives: signs it into law; it becomes law without a signature; or it is vetoed.



The General Assembly can override a Governor's veto. Both chambers need a three-fifths vote of the members present and voting to do so. The bill cannot be amended in this process, it bypasses the committee phase, and goes directly to a floor vote.

The bill becomes law without action by the Governor on the 7th day, minus Sunday, if the General Assembly is at recess, or on the 10th day, minus Sunday, if the General Assembly has adjourned.

The legislative process is nuanced, not to cause confusion, but to ensure thoughtfulness and transparency in creating the laws that govern us. Use this flow chart to better understand the process and learn how you can participate.

