

Legislative Glossary



Legislative language can be confusing and complex. The following glossary of terms may help you better understand what you are hearing and what you are reading. Recognizing and understanding these terms will help you become effective participants in the Illinois legislative process.

Act – An enforceable law of the State. A bill that has passed both houses of the General Assembly becomes an Act through the Governor's approval, inaction, or a veto procedure.

Adoption – Approval or acceptance; usually applied to amendments, resolutions, and motions.

Amendment – Formal proposal to change the language of a bill or resolution after it has been introduced.

Amendment, Committee – An amendment adopted by a committee when a bill is before that committee.

Amendment, Floor – An amendment adopted by the full house when the bill is on the order of second reading.

Approval by the Governor – Signature of the Governor on a bill passed by the General Assembly, whereupon the bill becomes an Act.

Bill – Legislation drafted in the form of an Act for introduction into the Senate or the House of Representatives and identified with a bill number. If the bill is passed by both houses and signed by the Governor or otherwise becomes law, it becomes an Act.

Bill, Amendatory – A bill that proposes changes to existing statutory law. The law to be changed by a bill is referred to in a Section's introductory clause.

Bill, Appropriation – A bill that authorizes a named governmental entity to expend a certain amount of money from a specific source, such as the General Revenue Fund, for a specific purpose.

Bill, Budget – A bill consisting of recommended appropriations of State funds presented by the Governor to the General Assembly for its consideration.

Bill, New/Original – A bill that proposes to create an entirely new law.

Bill, Revisory – A bill that combines multiple enactments, corrects technical errors, and revises, renumbers, and rearranges the law.

Bill, Shell/Vehicle – A bill that makes no substantive change in the law.

Bill Analysis – A document prepared by partisan staff of a house of the General Assembly that explains how a bill would change existing law and sometimes mentions support and opposition from major interest groups.

Certification – The action of the Governor when he or she assures that the General Assembly's acceptance of the Governor's amendatory veto of a bill conforms to the Governor's specific recommendations for change. The bill becomes law if the Governor certifies the bill. The bill is returned to the General Assembly as a vetoed bill if the Governor does not certify the bill.

Calendar – The daily printed agenda of business for each house of the General Assembly. The calendar also contains scheduled committee hearings.

Caucus – An informal meeting of a group of legislators, most often called on the basis of party affiliation or regional representation.

Chair – A designation of the presiding officer.

Committee, Standing – A group of legislators from the same house of the General Assembly organized for the purpose of performing certain legislative functions and to consider and decide on the disposition of legislation in a certain area of the law. Committees are the public forums of legislation.

Concurrence – Agreement by one house of the General Assembly to an amendment added by the other house. Also, adoption of a joint resolution originating in the other house.

Conference Committee – An even number of legislators, 5 from the Senate and 5 from the House of Representatives, who attempt to resolve differences between versions of a specific bill or joint resolution passed by their respective bodies. The conference committee reports recommendations back to the General Assembly for further action.

Consent Calendar – A listing of non-controversial bills and resolutions. No debate is in order for any item on the consent calendar.

Constituent – A citizen residing within the district of a legislator.

Constitution – A written instrument embodying the fundamental principles of the State that guarantees powers and duties of the government and certain rights to the people.

Constitutional Amendment Joint Resolution – A joint resolution that proposes to amend the Illinois Constitution. After adoption of the resolution by both houses of the General Assembly, a proposition to amend the Illinois Constitution is submitted to the electors of the State for adoption or rejection at the next general election.

Died in Committee – The defeat of a bill by the decision of a committee not to return the bill to the full house.

Convvene – To meet in formal legislative session.

Do Pass – The affirmative recommendation made by a committee in sending a bill to the full house for final vote.

Do Pass as Amended – Passage recommended providing certain changes are made.

Effective Date – Date on which a Public Act takes effect. The effective date of a law is the date it becomes generally enforceable.

Enacting Clause – The phrase in a bill that formally expresses the legislative sanction of the General Assembly. The enacting clause follows the title and is a necessary part of every bill. The phrase is "Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois, represented in the General Assembly".

Engrossment – The incorporation of amendments into a bill (or joint resolution) when a bill passes the house of origin and is sent to the second house. If not amended, the introduced version of the bill becomes the engrossed bill.

Enrollment – The processing of a bill (or joint resolution), incorporating all amendments, if any, when a bill passes both houses of the General Assembly. The enrolled bill is the document that is signed by both presiding officers and is then sent to the Governor.

Executive Order – Action by the Governor in implementing his or her authority under the law.

Fiscal Note – A statement attached to a bill giving the estimated amount of increase or decrease in revenue or expenditures and the present and future fiscal implications of a bill.

Fiscal Year – A 12-month accounting period. For the State of Illinois, the fiscal year begins July 1 and ends June 30 of the following year.

General Assembly (Legislature) – The branch of State government responsible for enacting laws. In Illinois, legislative power is vested in the General Assembly. The General Assembly is a continuous body during the term for which members of the House of Representatives are elected (2 years).

Hearing, Committee – A committee meeting convened for the purpose of gathering information on a specific subject or considering specific legislative measures.

Home Rule Unit – A county that has a chief executive officer elected by the electors of the county, a municipality that has a population of more than 25,000, and any other municipality that elects by referendum to become a home rule unit. A home rule unit may elect by referendum not to be a home rule unit. A home rule unit has broad authority to exercise certain powers and perform certain functions pertaining to its government and affairs. The General Assembly, however, may deny or limit certain powers and functions of home rule units.

Illinois Compiled Statutes (ILCS) – An official compilation of the laws of the State organized by chapter, which is a subject matter grouping, and section numbers.

Legislation – A document that proposes to create or change law.

Legislative Day – A day in which a house of the General Assembly is in Session.

Legislative Intent – The purpose for which a bill is introduced or passed.

Legislative Measure – Any matter brought before a house of the General Assembly for consideration, such as a bill, resolution, amendment, conference committee report, motion, or message.

Legislative Redistricting – A redrawing of legislative and representative district boundaries to provide equality of representation according to population; done in the year following each federal decennial census year.

Legislative Reference Bureau – The legislative support agency that drafts and prepares such legislative measures as bills, amendments, resolutions, and conference committee reports at the request of legislators.

Legislative Research Unit – The legislative support agency that answers legislators' questions on legal, scientific, economic, historical, and other subjects relating to pending or contemplated legislative actions; also is the successor to the Illinois Commission on Intergovernmental Cooperation.

Legislator – A member of the General Assembly. A legislator is a Senator if he or she is a member of the Senate or a Representative if he or she is a member of the House of Representatives.

Legislature – See General Assembly

Lobbyist – A person who represents a particular interest or group of interests before the General Assembly.

Majority Leader – In both the House of Representatives and the Senate, the member who is the second-ranking official. The Majority Leader is appointed by the Speaker or the President and is the key advisor to the Speaker or the President and the majority Caucus.

Minority Leader – In both the House of Representatives and the Senate, the Minority Leader is selected by the minority party and is formally elected by all members. The Minority Leader's responsibilities include appointing members to serve on committees, selecting assistant leaders and staff, and serving as spokesperson for the minority party.

Motion – A formal suggestion, usually oral, made by a legislator to a presiding officer calling for specific action by a house of the General Assembly, such as a motion to adopt an amendment or a motion to adjourn. After a motion is officially received by the presiding officer, it is acted upon by a vote of the house.

Municipality – A city, village, or incorporated town.

Opening Day – The day fixed by the Illinois Constitution for the convening of a Regular Session of the General Assembly, which is the second Wednesday in January.

Order of Business – The defined routine of procedure in a house of the General Assembly each day; may be changed by the presiding officer (or in the House of Representatives, upon motion of a member).

Out of Order – A ruling that a motion, an amendment, or a question is improper under the rules of the house.

Parliamentary Inquiry – A question posed to the presiding officer for clarification of a point in the proceedings.

Passage – Approval of a bill by the vote of the full house.

Per Diem – Literally, per day; daily expense money paid to legislators.

Point of Order – A statement by a legislator calling attention to an alleged breach of order or parliamentary procedure, upon which the presiding officer must rule.

Point of Personal Privilege – A statement by a legislator that is not relevant to pending business, such as a request to be recorded as voting "aye" or "nay" on a previous roll call or a request to recognize visitors in the gallery.

Postpone – To delay consideration of a bill or resolution until a specific legislative day or hour of the same day.

Preamble – In a bill, a statement of purpose or explanation that is inserted between the title and the enacting clause. A preamble in a bill does not become part of an Act, but a court may use it as a tool of statutory construction in ascertaining legislative intent. In a resolution, one or more explanatory clauses beginning with "whereas".

Prefile – To file a bill with a house of the General Assembly during a specified period of time before the opening day of a Regular Session. The bill is deemed automatically introduced on the opening day.

Presiding Officer – The member of the Senate or the House of Representatives whose responsibilities include administering the business of the house, controlling the order of business, referring bills, interpreting rules, and recognizing legislators to speak.

Previous Question (Motion for) – Action to prevent additional debate on or amendment of a question and to cause an immediate vote on the matter at issue.

Public Act – A bill that has been passed by the General Assembly and signed by the Governor (or otherwise has become law). After a bill has been signed by the Governor or otherwise becomes law, the Secretary of State assigns the bill a Public Act number, which is subsequently used to refer to the measure rather than the bill number. The Public Act number consists of the number of the General Assembly followed by a dash and then a number showing the order in which the law was filed with the Secretary of State. Public Acts for a particular year are bound into volumes referred to as the Session Laws of Illinois.

Quorum – The required number of legislators present to transact business. In the General Assembly, a majority of the members elected to a house constitutes a quorum.

Reading – Presentation of a bill before either house of the General Assembly by reading its title; a stage in the enactment of a law. Each bill introduced must be read by title on 3 different days in each house before it is passed. The first reading introduces the bill. The second reading allows for floor amendments. A bill is voted on when called for third reading.

Recede – To undo action previously taken.

Recess – Intermission during a daily Session, usually for caucus or committee meetings.

Reconsider (Motion to) – Action to retake a vote. The motion may be offered only by a legislator having voted previously on the prevailing side.

Re-enrollment – The final processing of a bill when the Governor has amendatorily vetoed the bill and the General Assembly accepts the Governor's proposed changes. Re-enrollment incorporates the Governor's proposed changes. The re-enrolled bill is presented to the Governor for certification.

Referral – The assignment of a legislative measure to a committee.

Repeal – To delete and make of no effect.

Report – To communicate opinion or recommendations.

Resolution – Action, in the form of a formal legislative document, taken by the Senate alone, the House of Representatives alone, or both the Senate and House acting jointly. A resolution does not change statutory or constitutional law and is not approved or otherwise acted upon by the Governor (and thus is not a law). The effect of a typical resolution is merely to express the opinion of one or both houses or to take some action short of enacting a law that is within the province of one or both houses. Also, a resolution is typically temporary in character. Some resolutions do have legal effect, such as those relating to recommendations of the Compensation Review Board, school mandate waivers, and the authorization of toll highways.

Resolved Clause – Language in a resolution defining the action taken.

Roll Call – To determine a vote on a question by the taking of names of those in favor and those opposed.

Rules – A code of procedure adopted by each house of the General Assembly to govern its operations.

Ruling of the Chair – A decision by a presiding officer concerning a question of order or procedure.

Section – The basic segment of a bill, with each Section being assigned a sequential number. Existing statutory law is also referred to by Section number.

Senate President – The presiding officer of the Senate, elected by the Senate from its membership.

Sergeant-at-Arms – An official elected by the Senate whose duties include controlling access to the floor of the chamber.

Session – The period of time during which the General Assembly meets.

Session, Daily – Each day's meeting.

Session, Joint – A meeting of the two houses of the General Assembly together.

Session, Perfunctory – Session in which the Secretary of the Senate or the Clerk of the House may read into the record any legislative measure, committees may meet and may consider and act upon legislative measures, and the Secretary or Clerk may receive and read committee reports into the record. No further action may be taken with respect to a legislative measure during a Perfunctory Session, and legislators are not required to attend a Perfunctory Session.

Session, Regular – A Session convened on a regular basis by way of constitutional provision as to its date and in which all legislative measures are considered. The General Assembly convenes Regular Session each year (beginning in an odd-numbered year) on the second Wednesday in January and usually adjourns at the end of May.

Session, Special – A Session convened by the Governor or both presiding officers for a specific purpose set out in a proclamation.

Session, Veto – A Session held after adjournment of a Regular Session when the General Assembly reconvenes to consider the Governor's vetoes.

Speaker of the House of Representatives – The presiding officer of the House of Representatives, elected by the House from its membership.

Sponsor – The legislator who introduces a bill (or resolution). Other legislators may show their support by signing on as co-sponsors. The principal sponsor of a bill controls that bill.

Status of Legislation – The progress of a bill or resolution at any given time in the legislative process. This can be determined either by referring to the Illinois General Assembly's website, which provides a constant update on all legislative action, or the Legislative Synopsis and Digest.

Statutes – Individual laws that comprise the Illinois Compiled Statutes.

Sunset Date – The expiration date of a law.

Suspension of Rules – Parliamentary procedure whereby an action can be taken that would otherwise be out of order.

Synopsis – A summary of the contents of a bill required to be attached to each bill upon introduction.

Tabling – Laying on the table or killing. Tabling removes a bill, resolution, or amendment from consideration.

Title of Bill – The caption of a bill that precedes the enacting clause and expresses the subject of the bill.

Transcript – A record of the actual floor debate that has taken place in the Senate or the House of Representatives on a legislative day, consisting of what is spoken by each legislator.

Unit of Local Government – A county, municipality, township, special district, or a unit designated as a unit of local government by law that exercises limited governmental powers or powers in respect to limited governmental subjects. The term does not include a school district.

Verification – An action whereby a legislator requests that the results of a record vote be confirmed. The names of those legislators whose votes are to be verified are called, and if the legislator doesn't answer, his or her vote is stricken. However, the legislator's vote is restored to the roll if his or her presence is recognized before the presiding officer announces the final result of the verification.

Veto – The action of the Governor in disapproval of a bill sent to him or her by the General Assembly.

Veto, Amendatory – The Governor returns the bill to the General Assembly with specific recommendations for change. The General Assembly may do nothing and the bill dies, the General Assembly may override the veto, or the General Assembly may accept the Governor's proposed changes.

Veto, Item – The Governor vetoes an item in an appropriation bill. The General Assembly may do nothing and the item dies, or the General Assembly may override the item veto. In either event, the remainder of the bill becomes law.

Veto, Reduction – The Governor reduces the amount of an item of an appropriation bill. The General Assembly may do nothing and the reduction stands, or the General Assembly may restore the item to its original amount. In either event, the remainder of the bill becomes law.

Veto, Total – The Governor vetoes the bill in its entirety. The General Assembly may do nothing and the bill dies, or the General Assembly may override the total veto.

Vote – Formal expression of will or decision by a house of the General Assembly.

Vote, Record – A roll call vote in which each legislator electronically votes yea, nay, or present (which is entered on the Journal). Final passage of a bill is by record vote.

Vote, Voice – The oral expression of legislators when a question is submitted for their determination. Response is given by yeas and nays, and the presiding officer states his or her decision as to which side prevails. Only the result is recorded.

Withdraw – To recall or remove a question from consideration.

Yield – The relinquishing of the floor by one legislator to another legislator to speak or ask a question during debate.

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