

North Carolina's Legislative Branch

The legislative power of the state is outlined in Article II of the North Carolina Constitution. The legislative branch, or the General Assembly, is bicameral, which means that it consists of two bodies, or houses: the Senate and the House of Representatives. The General Assembly meets annually, holding "long" sessions in odd-numbered years and continuing the long sessions in "short" sessions, which take place in even-numbered years. An extra session will be held if 3/5 of the members of both houses request a session or if the Governor requests one. Every citizen in North Carolina lives in the district of one member of the Senate and one member of the House of Representatives.

Legislative Structure

SENATE HOUSE

50 Members 120 Members

2-year terms 2-year terms

Must be a qualified North Carolina voter, 25 years old, live in North Carolina for 2 years, and live in his/her district for at least 1 year

Must be a qualified North Carolina voter and live in his/her district for at least 1 year

The leadership of the Senate includes the Lieutenant Governor, who is President of the Senate and leads the daily sessions of the Senate, but can vote only in the case of a tie, and the President Pro Tempore, who is elected by the members of the Senate and exercises the powers of the presiding officer, such as appointing members to committees.

The House of Representatives is led by the Speaker of the House, who is chosen by members of the House.

Legislative Process

The primary duty of the General Assembly is to enact laws. A proposed law is called a bill. Bills can be introduced in either the Senate or the House of Representatives. Both the Senate and the House have committees to research, analyze, and debate bills.

At the beginning of each session, the President Pro Tempore of the Senate and the Speaker of the House appoint members to serve on the standing committees of each respective body. There are a dozen or more committees in each house. Every bill introduced is studied by at least one committee.

The President Pro Tempore and the Speaker of the House can also form select committees to deal with specific issues for a limited time.

Bills that are reported favorably by a committee are then presented to the full body (Senate or House) for a vote.

When the Senate and House disagree about the final version of a bill, a joint conference committee may be appointed to negotiate differences and propose a compromise on which both houses then vote.

Once most bills pass the General Assembly, they must be presented to the Governor before they can become law.

Once presented with the bill, the Governor has three options:

1. If he or she signs the bill, it becomes a law.

2. If he or she vetoes the bill, it is sent back to the General Assembly with his/her objections.

3. If he or she does not act on a bill within 10 days, it automatically becomes law.

BUDGET

The appropriations bill—or "budget bill"—is the most significant bill handled by the General Assembly. The bill, which is passed every odd-numbered year, outlines how the state will spend its money over a two-year period. The budget process begins when the Governor proposes a budget to the General Assembly. The legislature modifies the proposal, approves its own version of the budget, and then returns it to the Governor for his or her signature. The General Assembly revises the budget during the short session in even-numbered years.