



Glossary of Legislative Terms

Action Alerts

Emails, phone calls, social media posts, and other requests for rape crisis center action on legislation. Action Alerts often provide a brief overview of the bill, PCAR's position on the bill, and talking points to use in emailing and calling your legislators to request their support or opposition.

Amendment

A change to a bill or law. Amendments can be initiated by individuals, organizations, legislative committees, or legislators. Amendments can occur from the time a bill is introduced to its final passage.

Bill

A document that is drafted to establish new or amend existing laws. A bill is often amended from its introduction to its final passage.

Bi-partisan

Inclusive of both political parties. For example, supported by both Democrats and Republicans.

Chair

Every Committee has a Majority and Minority Chair person. The Majority Chair is from the party that dominates the Chamber; the Minority is from the party with fewer members. For example, in 2018 in Pennsylvania, Republicans served as the majority party and the Democrats as the minority party. The Majority Chair oversees the Committee's agenda and schedule, with assistance from the Executive Director.

Chambers

There are two chambers in the legislature: the House of Representatives and the Senate. Pennsylvania's House of Representatives has 203 members; the Senate has 50 members.

Committed

A bill's originating chamber will favorably report the bill as Committed after it has been amended by the other Chamber and sent back for consideration. If the originating chamber agrees with the changes, the bill gets a "Committed" report and is placed on the Floor calendar for a vote.

Committee

A group of legislators who are appointed by the Chamber's leadership to review, amend, and vote on bills that pertain to a certain topic or area of law. Once a Committee votes on a bill, it either goes to the Chamber for a full consideration and vote or dies in Committee. For a list of Standing Committee in the General Assembly, go here:

Senate: <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/CteeInfo/StandingCommittees.cfm?CteeBody=S>

House: <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/CteeInfo/StandingCommittees.cfm?CteeBody=H>

Committee Agenda

Priority bills that will be considered in Committee during a scheduled meeting.

Consideration

A bill must be "considered" by the Chamber three times before it can potentially be passed to the Governor for signature. Consideration can involve discussion and debate by the Chamber's members, testimony, amendments, and ultimate votes in favor or opposition.

Co-sponsorship Memo

A document that aims to a.) describe in plain language, the intent of the bill and b.) invite legislators to sign-on in support of the bill, as "co-sponsors."

Co-sponsors

Legislators who have signed-on in support of a bill.

Dies in Committee

If a bill does not make it out of Committee, it will not be considered by the larger Chamber or passed into law. If it "dies in Committee," it did not get enough support of the members.

Executive Directors

Every Committee has two Executive Directors who are the lead staff for the Majority and Minority Chairs of the Committee. The Executive Directors oversee the Committee's legislative efforts and provide context, information, and stakeholder input to Committee members as they consider bills.

General Assembly

Pennsylvania's legislative body of elected officials that consider and make laws.

Favorable Vote

This means the bill received more support than opposition by the Committee where it was assigned and/or by the full Chamber.

Floor

When a bill goes to “the Floor,” it goes to the full Chamber—either the House of Representatives or the Senate—for their consideration. If the Chamber’s leadership and members support the bill, it will be considered on the Floor before coming up for a vote. The bill can also be amended on the Floor before it is either passed or it dies.

Kill the Bill

If legislators do not support a bill, they can “kill it,” by voting against it, and by convincing their colleagues to join them in that vote. Advocacy groups also work to kill a bill they find problematic for their work and constituents. A bill can be “killed,” in Committee or on the Floor.

Legislators

Elected officials that are voted into office. Legislators include Representatives, who serve in the House of Representatives or Senators, who serve in the Senate. Every district in Pennsylvania has both State and Federal-level legislators. State-level legislators serve in the Pennsylvania General Assembly in Harrisburg. Federal-level legislators serve in the United States Congress in Washington, D.C.

Legislature

A body responsible for making laws. The terms, “legislature,” “General Assembly,” “Congress,” “the Capitol,” and “the Hill,” are often used interchangeably to refer to this legislative body of elected officials. It is important to note, though, that the state and federal legislatures are distinct legislative bodies—the General Assembly makes laws that govern Pennsylvania; Congress makes laws that govern the country. There are links, but also clear distinctions. Both State and Federal legislatures are often referred to as “the Capitol” or “the Hill.”

Member

This is a term often used to refer to a legislator. They are “members of the House of Representatives or the Senate.” Member is inclusive of both chambers’ elected officials.

Move the Bill

This refers to much of the work that is done in Committee, including putting a bill on the Committee’s agenda for consideration and a vote.

President Pro Tempore

The head of the Senate.

Prime Sponsor

The legislator who is the lead on the bill and efforts to get it passed. The prime sponsor introduces the bill to their Chamber. Their name appears first on the bill.

Roll Call

When a bill comes up for a vote in Committee, every member's name is read, and a vote of "Yea," or "Nay," is recorded member by member. On the Floor, roll call is done electronically and appears on the large digital screen in the House and in the Senate.

Sine Die

The official recess of the legislature at the end of the session.

Speaker of the House

The head of the House of Representatives.

Strong Second Sponsor

The legislator who works closely with the prime sponsor in drafting, introducing, and building support for a bill. They are from the same Chamber as the prime sponsor, but often from the other political party to help build bi-partisan support. The second sponsor's name appears after the prime sponsor's on the bill.

Table

If a bill is "laid on the table," it may be considered at a later date. If it is "removed from the table," it is up for possible consideration and may be placed on its Chamber's calendar.

Voting Schedule

The House and Senate post their voting schedule daily. This is a schedule that shows which bills are being considered by the Chambers' and whether those bills are on first, second, or third consideration.



Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape

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