

# ILLINOIS STATE LEGISLATURE FAQ

## WHAT IS THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF THE ILLINOIS LEGISLATIVE BRANCH?

Illinois' legislative branch is made up of the House and Senate, and is called the Illinois General Assembly (ILGA). Its main functions include enacting, amending or repealing laws; passing resolutions; adopting spending bills; and examining proposed legislation. It also acts on amendments to the U.S. Constitution when they are submitted by Congress and proposes and submits amendments to the Illinois Constitution for consideration by voters.

Representatives are elected from Representative Districts throughout the state. There are 118 Representative Districts in Illinois, each of which sends one Representative to the House. Representatives serve two year terms.

Senators are elected from Legislative Districts from throughout the state. There are 59 Legislative Districts in Illinois each of which sends one Senator to the Senate. Senators serve either two or four year terms.

## WHEN IS THE LEGISLATIVE SESSION?

The Illinois General Assembly convenes each year in January remains in session until May 31<sup>st</sup>. The General Assembly reconvenes for two weeks in the Fall to consider the Governor's vetoes. At other times, special sessions may be convened by the Governor or a joint proclamation by the presiding officers of both chambers. This proclamation confines legislative negotiation to specific subjects.

## WHERE DOES THE ILLINOIS GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONVENE?

The Illinois General Assembly holds session in the Illinois State Capitol in Springfield. When legislators are not in session, committee hearings may be held in other locations around the state. Representatives and Senators maintain offices in their districts and in Springfield.

## HOW MANY VOTES ARE NEEDED FOR A BILL TO BECOME A LAW?

A bill needs 60 votes in the House and 30 votes in the Senate to pass out of each chamber. If the General Assembly chooses to override a veto by the Governor, a higher threshold of votes is needed. The General Assembly can override a veto with 71 votes in the House and 36 votes in the Senate. [Click here to see a detailed version of how a bill becomes a law in Illinois.](#)

## WHAT IS A COMMITTEE HEARING?

Committee hearings are a method by which committee members gather information on various legislative proposals or topics. Committees are categorized by subject area and legislation is usually assigned to the committee that can best assess the merits of the proposal. Below are the three types of committee hearings in the ILGA.

- I. **Legislation only committee hearing:** The committee meets only to review and vote on legislation.

- II. **Subject Matter only committee hearing:** The committee meets to discuss a specific topic and does not require a vote by committee members.
- III. **Subject Matter with Legislation:** The committee meets to both discuss a specific topic but will also vote on legislation that may or may not be related to the subject matter being discussed.

#### **WHERE CAN I FIND INFORMATION ABOUT COMMITTEE HEARINGS?**

You can find information about committee hearings on the [Illinois General Assembly website](#) or the [Illinois General Assembly Dashboard](#). Committee hearings are available for live video/audio streaming on the ILGA website during session. The House of Representatives maintains audio recordings of committee hearings for public record while the Senate has no committee hearings audio/video records available to the public. You can contact the [House of Representatives Clerks Office](#) to obtain audio records of previous committee hearings.

#### **CAN I PARTICIPATE IN A COMMITTEE HEARING?**

If you would like to state your position or provide written or oral testimony during a committee hearing, you must file a witness slip. To learn more about the Illinois General Assembly Dashboard and filing a witness slip, [click here](#).

#### **WHAT HAPPENS TO A BILL AFTER IT BECOMES A LAW?**

The requirements of the law take effect immediately unless the law itself provides for another date. The law will also specify which executive departments or agencies are empowered to carry it out or enforce it.

#### **WHAT IS LOBBYING?**

Lobbying is a form of advocacy with the intention of influencing decisions made by the government on behalf individuals or groups. The ACLU of IL lobbies on behalf of our members to protect and expand the constitutional rights of all Illinoisans. Most people think of lobbyists only as paid professionals, but anyone who petitions the government or contacts their legislators to voice an opinion is functioning as a lobbyist. [Learn more about how to advocate to your legislators](#).