

Dear Friend,

This brochure includes a brief description of the legislative process and gives an overview of how a bill becomes a law.



Knowledgeable and informed voters are essential to our democracy. By following the news, knowing the issues and contacting your elected representatives, you can make a significant contribution to the legislative process.

As your elected representative in the New York State Assembly, I welcome your comments and suggestions. We have been entrusted with a great legacy – representative government. I hope you will take advantage of the many ways in which you can be an active participant in your state government.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carl E. Heastie".

Carl E. Heastie  
Speaker of the Assembly

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# The Legislative Process and You



A message from ...  
**Speaker of the Assembly  
Carl E. Heastie**



## Your **State Legislature**

In New York State, there are three branches of government: the legislative, comprised of the Senate and Assembly; the executive, headed by the governor; and the judicial, comprised of the courts. This brochure focuses on the legislative branch and examines the process through which a bill becomes a law.

The Assembly, with its 150 members, and the Senate, with its 63 members, make up the New York State Legislature. Members of both houses are up for election every two years.

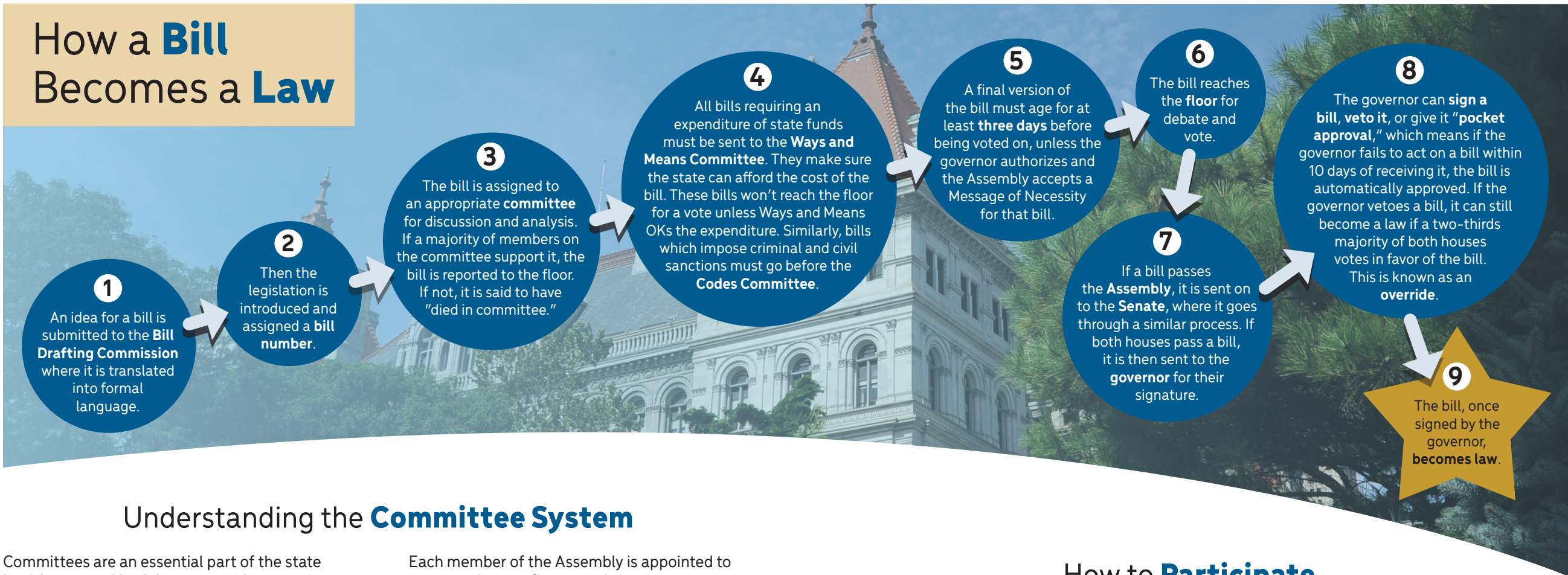
In the Assembly, the member presiding over the legislative session is known as the Speaker. The Speaker is elected for a two-year term by their colleagues. In the Senate, the lieutenant governor presides, but the Senate Majority Leader is the person whose work most closely parallels that of the Speaker of the Assembly. Both the Speaker and the Majority Leader have the power to create committees and appoint legislators to serve on those committees.

Each legislative session begins on the first Wednesday after the first Monday of the new year. The Legislature attends session in Albany until its business for that year is concluded. While session usually ends in June, legislators can be called back to Albany for special legislative sessions, formal meetings, committee work or public hearings year-round.

At the heart of the legislative process is the means by which a bill becomes a law. The diagram on the inside of this brochure shows the key steps of that process. Ideas for bills come from many sources, not just from government agencies or officials. In fact, if you have an idea for a law, you can call your representative and discuss it with them.



# How a **Bill** Becomes a **Law**



## Understanding the **Committee System**

Committees are an essential part of the state Legislature, and both houses use the committee system to accomplish work. You can think of the committee system as a screening process during which smaller groups of legislators closely scrutinize bills. The committees analyze the merits of the legislation, hold hearings for public input and vote on whether it should be advanced for a vote on the Assembly floor.

Within the committees are subcommittees, which are established to study specific aspects of larger issues being reviewed by the full committee.

Bills are assigned to committees based on the subject they address. For example, a bill that affects senior citizens would be sent to the Aging Committee, while a bill affecting consumers would go to the Consumer Affairs and Protection Committee.

Each member of the Assembly is appointed to serve on three to five committees.

Committees meet regularly to discuss the bills referred to them. Meetings are broadcast for public viewing if you wish to see how the process works. Legislative sessions, where the bills are voted on and debated by the entire house, are also broadcast for public viewing. Visit [nyassembly.gov/av](http://nyassembly.gov/av) to watch a livestream of proceedings or search and view archived footage.

To find out when a particular committee will meet, what's on its agenda or when the Legislature is in session, call the Assembly's Public Information Office at **518-455-4218** or connect online at [nyassembly.gov/PIO](http://nyassembly.gov/PIO).

## How to **Participate**

You can be an active participant in the process and help pass or defeat legislation by sharing your opinions and positions with legislators.

If you want to advocate for or against a bill, it's good to start by knowing the official bill number and its sponsor. That information is helpful when communicating with legislators and makes it easier to track the bill's progress. You can search for information about a specific bill with the Assembly's online bill search feature at [nyassembly.gov/leg](http://nyassembly.gov/leg).

Next, contact your assemblymember to share your position. Legislators want to hear from the people in their district. When a bill is assigned

to a committee, you can also contact the committee chair and others on the committee.

Make your final campaign for or against a bill just before it comes up for a vote on the Assembly floor. Even one constituent letter, email or call on a bill could impact a legislator's vote.

If a bill passes the Assembly and is sent to the Senate, you will be able to go through the same process there. If it passes both houses, the bill goes before the governor, who will either sign it into law or veto it. The governor's action can also be influenced by your calls and letters.

Remember, the best way to effect change is to make your views known and be persistent.