

## How exactly does a bill become a law?

Think "Schoolhouse Rock!" but at the state level. Iowa lawmakers submit hundreds of bills each session. Other entities also propose bills, including the governor's office, the judicial branch and executive branch agencies.

Once a bill is introduced, the Senate president or speaker of the House will assign the bill to a specific committee, which is a smaller group of legislators that focus on specific areas, such as education or public safety.

Those bills must pass through a subcommittee and then be voted through the full committee. Then, if a majority of those smaller groups of lawmakers approve, the bills go to the floor, where the full body of lawmakers will vote.

The majority party has discretion over which bills receive hearings and floor votes. That means Republicans are largely setting the agenda.

If a bill passes, it goes to the other chamber and follows the same subcommittee, committee and floor vote process. Both chambers must pass identical versions of a bill for it to be forwarded to the governor, so if a bill is amended in the second chamber, it goes back to the first chamber for another vote.

Sometimes, the House and Senate will advance identical bills separately, and then join them together at the end of the process.

Approved bills then head to the governor's desk, where she can choose whether to sign them. If the governor vetoes a bill, the Legislature can override the veto if two-thirds of the members in each chamber vote to pass the bill again.

## The legislative session lasts about 100 days. It also could go longer

Activity at the Capitol ramps up quickly in the opening weeks of the session, as lawmakers file hundreds of bills and begin holding subcommittee meetings, committee meetings and floor votes. And a series of deadlines helps to keep the action moving.

One important deadline often marks a target to end the session. This year that's April 19, the 100th calendar day of the session, which is when the per diem stipend that lawmakers receive for their work ends. Once that deadline passes, lawmakers start paying for their own apartments, hotel rooms and gas mileage.

But they could go longer. In 2021, the session stretched into overtime as lawmakers continued to work on a list of topics that included the state budget — one thing lawmakers must pass each year.

## There are two other deadlines, when many bills will die

Two other important deadlines that move the session along will come Feb. 18 and March 18. Those are the two legislative "funnel" deadlines, which establish how far a bill must advance through the legislative process to remain alive for future votes.

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During the first funnel in February, bills introduced in one chamber must receive approval from a full committee in that chamber. For example, a bill that a senator proposes must be voted through both a subcommittee and a full committee in the Senate to survive.

**From 2021:** The Iowa Legislature's first 'funnel' week is over. Which bills lived and which ones died?

During the second funnel, those bills must also pass a floor vote in the chamber where they were introduced, as well as make it through a committee in the opposite chamber. In the example above, that senator's bill would need to pass the full Senate, as well as be approved by a House subcommittee and committee, by the deadline.

**From 2021:** From abortion to 'defunding' police, here are the bills that are alive and dead in the Iowa Legislature so far

It's important to note, however, that not all proposals that fail to advance by funnel week are actually dead. Lawmakers can resurrect them in a number of ways, such as adding them as amendments to other bills or by leadership in both chambers co-sponsoring a new bill. The deadlines also don't apply to tax-related and spending bills.

In other words, nothing is over until the final gavel falls.

## **You can follow the action online**

Iowans have long had the ability to track bills and stream floor debates online, but their access increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, as lawmakers began streaming subcommittee and committee meetings. That means that it's easier than ever to track legislative action from wherever you are.

The House and Senate post daily agendas of subcommittee and committee meetings online, with information on how to stream them.

Tracking bills can be difficult because numbers change at different times in the legislative process, and bills are often amended or joined with other bills. But the legislative website has a number of tools to help find and keep track of legislation.

If you want to find your legislator and reach out, you can do so on the legislative website at <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/find>.

And of course, you can track all the action through the Des Moines Register in print, online and through your inbox, with our politics newsletter at <http://DesMoinesRegister.com/PoliticsNewsletter>. You can also find Register work on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

Adapted from a Des Moines Register article on the Iowa legislature (1/9/2022) by *Ian Richardson [who] covers the Iowa Statehouse for the Des Moines Register. Reach him at [irichardson@registermedia.com](mailto:irichardson@registermedia.com), at 515-284-8254, or on Twitter at [@DMRIanR](https://twitter.com/DMRIanR).*