

California Government Glossary

Legislature

The two “houses” that pass or reject proposed new laws.

Assembly: 80-member lower house of the Legislature. Its members serve two-year terms. 80 members are elected every two years.

Senate: 40-member upper house of the Legislature. Its members serve four-year terms. 20 members are elected every two years.

Legislation

Bill: A proposed law or statute that amends or repeals existing laws or proposes new laws. Most bills require a majority vote. If there is a fiscal impact, a bill requires a two-thirds vote.

- ▶ AB 0000—Assembly Bill
- ▶ SB 0000—Senate Bill

Constitutional Amendment: A proposed change in the state Constitution, which, after approval of two-thirds of the legislators, is submitted to the voters, who also must approve the change.

- ACA 0000—Assembly (authored) Constitutional Amendment.
- SCA 0000—Senate (authored) Constitutional Amendment.

Concurrent Resolution: A legislative proposal that commends individuals or groups, adopts legislative rules or establishes joint committees.

- ACR 0000—Assembly Concurrent Resolution.
- SCR 0000—Senate Concurrent Resolution.

Joint Resolution: A legislative opinion on matters pertaining to the federal government, often urging passage or defeat of legislation pending before Congress.

- AJR 0000—Assembly Joint Resolution.
- SJR 0000—Senate Joint Resolution.

Assembly and Senate Resolutions: An expression of sentiment of one house of the Legislature. Resolutions usually ask a committee to study a specific problem, create interim committees or amend house rules. Resolutions take effect upon adoption.

- AR 0000—Assembly Resolution.
- SR 0000—Senate Resolution.

Spot Bill: Bill introduced that usually makes nonsubstantive changes in a law. The spot bill is substantially amended at a later date. This procedure evades the deadline for the introduction of bills.

Legislative Process

Legislative Counsel: A staff of more than 80 attorneys who draft legislation (bills) and proposed amendments, review, analyze and render opinions on legal matters of concern to the Legislature. The Legislative Counsel’s Digest is a summary of a bill’s content contrasting existing law with proposed law (in lay language) and appears on the face of each bill.

Legislative Analyst: Provides advice to the Legislature on anything with a fiscal implication, which can cover virtually every major bill. The analyst annually publishes a detailed analysis of the Governor’s budget, which becomes the basis for legislative hearings on the fiscal program.

Author: Member of state Senate or Assembly who submits or introduces a bill and carries it through the legislative process.

Floor Manager: Speaks as author when the bill is being heard in the second house. (Assembly members are not allowed to present bills on the Senate floor and vice versa.)

Sponsor: Interest groups or constituents from the legislator’s district who bring suggested legislation to the attention of the prospective author (legislator).

Standing Committee: The forum used in the Senate and Assembly for studying bills and hearing testimony from the author, proponents and opponents.

- Many bills are heard by two or more committees in each house.
- If a majority of the committee members approve the bill, it is sent to the floor (or, if it has fiscal impact, to the Senate or Assembly Appropriations Committee) with a recommendation “Do Pass.” It takes a majority vote of committee members present to amend a bill.
- Your association’s legislative advocate and other members often testify before such committees.

Committee Consultants and Aides:

Every legislator has a personal staff plus the assistance of specialists assigned to committees and to the party caucuses. This research staff is responsible for analyzing the pros and cons of the proposed legislation.

Introduction and First Reading: Bill is submitted by member of Senate or Assembly, numbered and read. It is assigned to a committee by the Senate Rules Committee or Assembly Speaker and printed.

Second Reading: When the bill passes the policy committee, it is read on the house floor for a second time.

Third Reading: Bill is read a third time and debated. A roll call vote follows. If passed or passed with amendments, the bill is sent to the second house (or, if it already is in the second house, it is returned to the house of origin) for consideration of amendments.

Enrollment: Legislation that has passed both houses is sent to enrollment for proofreading for consistency before being sent to the Governor for approval.

California Promise: Opportunity for All

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Item Veto: Allows the Governor to veto (return unsigned a legislative proposal or indicate points of disagreement) objectionable parts of a bill without rejecting bills in their entirety.

Chaptered: A bill that has passed both houses and has been signed by the Governor is said to be “chaptered.” The bill becomes law January 1 of the following year unless it contains an urgency clause (takes effect immediately) or specifies its effective date.

Sunset Clause: Acts of the state Legislature that expire after a certain date unless renewed by the Legislature.

Voter Responses

The techniques of direct democracy enable citizens to bypass elected government bodies and act directly on policy matters.

Initiative: A local or state measure that is placed on the ballot after a certain number of registered voters sign petitions supporting its placement on the ballot. Initiatives often are used by groups or individuals when the Legislature fails to pass a law they want to enact.

Referendum: A procedure whereby the voters may approve or disapprove proposals recommended by a legislative body, such as a proposal for an increase in the tax rate.

Recall: A procedure whereby petitions are circulated calling for removal of a public official from office. If a sufficient number of signatures is obtained, an election is held in which voters decide whether to keep the official in office.

PAC: A Political Action Committee is a nonprofit committee that provides a lawful means to help elect and re-elect political candidates selected on the basis of their positions on industry-related issues, committee assignments and leadership in the Legislature. PACs make contributions to candidates or in support of or opposition to ballot measures.

Adapted from California Grocers Association publication.

California State Government — The Executive Branch

The executive branch administers and enforces the laws of California. Led by the Governor, the California executive branch is made up of more than 200 state entities.

The executive officials of the branch—such as the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State and Attorney General, to name a few—are elected by the people of California. Each of these officers is elected to serve a four-year term, and may be elected to an office a maximum of two times.

Within the executive branch there are four types of entities: agencies, which are headed by a secretary; departments, which are headed by a director; and boards and commissions, which are headed by an executive officer or board member.

A number of entities, such as the Regents of the University of California and the Public Utilities Commission, are intended to be independent of direct control by all three branches of the state government. Most of the leaders of these entities are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the California Senate.

The Governor also is responsible for appointing the secretaries/directors of 11 Cabinet-level state agencies/departments: Business, Consumer Services and Housing; Corrections and Rehabilitation (department); Environmental Protection; Finance (department); Food and Agriculture (department); Natural Resources; Government Operations; Health and Human Services; Labor and Workforce Development; Transportation; and Veterans Affairs (department).

Each Cabinet-level agency includes

multiple departments, whose leaders also are appointed by the Governor and usually subject to confirmation by the Senate. The Cabinet-level Natural Resources Agency, for example, includes the Department of Water Resources, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the California Energy Commission, to name three of 13 entities within that agency.

Each state entity wields significant power and plays a large role in interpreting and applying the laws of the state.

To find a state agency, department, board or office, visit www.ca.gov/agencysearch/.

The organization chart is available at <https://cold.govops.ca.gov/File/OrganizationalChart>.

Referral number for state agencies: (800) 807-6755.