A Guide to Navigating the Quirks of America’s State House

Each state has barriers that are put in place to dissuade civic engagement and therefore democracy. There are many obstacles and arbitrary deadlines. Below are some examples.

# Length of Legislature:

There is no consistency in how long a legislative session is scheduled. The length of a session may be set by a state's constitution, a statute, or by the legislature and varies among the states.

Four States meet only once every two years, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, and Texas. Meaning that you have limited days and even less opportunity to rectify laws.

## Session Deadline:

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| **STATE** | **SESSION DEADLINE** |
| Alabama | 30 meeting day session within a period of 105 calendar days |
| Alaska | 90 calendar day session |
| Arizona | 100 day session, may be extended one week by President of the Senate or Speaker of House |
| Arkansas | 60 day session |
| California | Year round |
| Colorado | 120 day session |
| Connecticut | January to June session in odd-numbered years.  February to May in even-numbered years. |
| Delaware | Last day of June |
| Florida | 60 day session |
| Georgia | 40 legislative days |
| Hawaii | 60 working days (excludes weekends, holidays, designated recess days) |
| Idaho | January to mid-March session |
| Illinois | Year round |
| Indiana | 61 legislative days during odd-numbered years.  30 legislative days during even-numbered years. |
| Iowa | ~110 calendar days |
| Kansas | Unlimited in odd-numbered years.  90 calendar days in even-numbered years. |
| Kentucky | 60 days in even-numbered years (conclude by April 15).  30 days in odd-numbered years (conclude by March 30). |
| Louisiana | 60 legislative days within 85 day period in even-numbered years.  45 legislative days within 60 day period in odd-numbered years. |
| Maine | During two year period: December to June session and January to April session |
| Maryland | 90 calendar days, can extend an additional 30 days upon vote by legislature |
| Massachusetts | Year round |
| Michigan | Year round |
| Minnesota | 120 legislative day session in odd-numbered years.  January to May session in even-numbered years. |
| Mississippi | 90 calendar days.  125 calendar days during presidential election years. |
| Missouri | January to May session |
| Montana | 90 legislative days every odd-numbered year. |
| Nebraska | 60 legislative days in even-numbered years.  90 legislative days in odd-numbered years |
| Nevada | 120 day session |
| New Hampshire | January to June session |
| New Jersey | Year round |
| New Mexico | 60 calendar days in odd-numbered years.  30 calendar days in even-numbered years. |
| New York | Session is year round, but takes a summer break in June |
| North Carolina | ~6 months in odd-numbered years.  ~6 weeks in even-numbered years. |
| North Dakota | 80 day session once every two years |
| Ohio | Year round |
| Oklahoma | February to May session |
| Oregon | 160 days in odd-numbered years.  30 days in even-numbered years. |
| Pennsylvania | Year round |
| Rhode Island | January to June session |
| South Carolina | January to May session |
| South Dakota | 40 working days in odd-numbered years.  35 working days in even-numbered years. |
| Tennessee | 90 legislative days |
| Texas | 140 day session once every 2 years |
| Utah | 45 days session |
| Virginia | 60 days in even-numbered years.  30 days in odd-numbered years. |
| Vermont | January to mid-April/May session |
| Washington | 105 day session in odd-numbered years.  60 day session in even-numbered years. |
| West Virginia | 60 calendar days. |
| Wisconsin | Year round |
| Wyoming | No more than 60 legislative days every two years, no more than 40 legislative days in a given year. |

# Bill Introduction Limits:

Many states limit the amount of bills that can be introduced in a session. This is more often than not a law but a rule set by the rules committee. This was done as a way to prevent filing legislation for the sake of running out an already limited clock on passing legislation. This has become an ongoing problem in trying to get legislation sponsored, legislators will say that even though they support the legislation and will sign on as a co-sponsor, they have already committed on what laws they will propose. Add to that the challenge of having your legislation sponsored by someone is in the majority party, especially during these hyper partisan times.

## State Breakdown:

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| **CHAMBER** | **AUTHORITY** | **CURRENT REQUEST OR INTRODUCTION LIMIT** |
| Arizona House | House Rule 8(C) | After the fourth day of session, only seven more bills |
| California Senate | Senate Rule 22.5 | Not more than 40 bills in the [two-year] regular session |
| California Assembly | Assembly Rule 49 | Not more than 50 bills in the [two-year] regular session |
| Colorado Senate and House | Joint Rule 24(b) | Not more than five bills in a regular session |
| Florida House | House Rule 5.3 | Not more than six bills for a regular session |
| Indiana Senate | Senate Rule 48 | First regular session—no limit  Second regular session—not more than 10 bills or joint resolutions |
| Indiana House | House Rule 108 | First regular session—not more than 10 bills  Second regular session—not more than five bills |
| Louisiana Senate and House | Constitution Article 3, Sec. 2(A) | Not more than five bills that were not prefiled |
| Montana Senate and House | Joint Rule 40-40 | Before 5 p.m. on Dec. 5, unlimited.  After that, a member may request no more than seven bills or resolutions. |
| Nevada Senate and Assembly | Joint Rule 14 | After a regular legislative session has convened and if submitted before 5 p.m. on the 15th calendar day, not more than 60 requests, in total, from each chamber. |
| North Carolina House | House Rule 31.1 | Not more than 15 public bills |
| North Dakota Senate | Senate Rule 402 | After the eighth legislative day, only three more bills |
| North Dakota House | House Rule 402 | After the third legislative day, only five more bills |
| Oklahoma House | House custom    House Rule 6.4 | Request limit—15 bills    As principal author, only eight bills during a session |
| Tennessee Senate | Senate Rule 25 | After Thursday of the second week of each annual session, not more than nine general bill introductions |
| Tennessee House | House Rule 44 | Not more than 15 bills during each annual session |
| Virginia Senate | 2016 HJR 37 | Not more than a combined total of eight bills and joint resolutions |
| Virginia House | 2016 HJR 37    House Rule 37 | Resolution—Not more than a combined total of five bills and joint resolutions  Rule—Not more than 15 bills during the regular session of an odd-numbered year |
| Wyoming Senate | Senate Rule 4-3    Senate Rule 13-3 | Not more than seven bills in any session    Not more than three bills in any budget session |
| Wyoming House | House Rule 13-1 | Not more than five bills in any budget session |

# Suppression Methods:

## False Critical Information:

In several states, including over the course of the 2019 legislative session, public information available online regarding deadlines and dates did not match the practice of the legislature. While states often list filing deadlines, they neglect to inform the public about intent-to-file deadlines. Members must declare their intent to file an upcoming bill before it can be filed. Once missed, these earlier intent-to-file deadlines make it impossible for legislation to be brought forward.

### Montana:

* In 2019, deadlines that ended more than a month earlier than the posted deadline.

### Louisiana:

* In 2019, deadlines that ended more than a month earlier than the posted deadline.

### Kentucky:

* In 2019, intent-to-file deadlines were pushed up a week earlier than publicly posted.

### Arizona:

* In 2019, intent-to-file deadlines were pushed up a week earlier than publicly posted.

### Mississippi:

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## Filing Deadline:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **STATE** | **FILING DEADLINE** |
| Indiana | Two days after the start of session. Thus, all lobbying and finding sponsors must be done prior, usually in November of the previous year |
| Massachusetts | Last week in January |

## Wait period

### California:

* Bills must be publicly submitted 30 days before introduction.
* This rule, dating back to 1879, requires bills that have been pre-filed, are widely supported, and otherwise would not face significant obstacles, to sit and wait while the arbitrary clock ticks.

## Preventing Testimony

### Washington:

* Must sign in for any hearings at which you plan to testify no later than midnight the night before the hearing
  + Can sign up at one of the kiosks located on the campus of the capitol building.
* You will not be able to testify if you have not registered.

# Legislative Calendar:

In every state the legislative calendar, or agenda, determine both which bills will be heard during a given day and the order they will be heard in. Each state has a different method of determining the calendar and in some states a committee or individual holds lots of power over the calendar.

## State Breakdown:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **STATE** | **CALENDAR CONTROL** |
| Alabama | Senate - Rules Chair  House - Rules Chair |
| Alaska | Senate - Rules Chair  House - Rules Chair |
| Arizona | Senate - President  House - Speaker |
| Arkansas | Senate - President  House - Speaker |
| California | Senate - In the order passed or reported from the preceding calendar or reading  Assembly - In order reported from committee |
| Colorado | Senate - Majority Leader  House - Majority Leader |
| Connecticut | Senate - In order reported from committee  House - In order reported from committee |
| Delaware | Senate - President Pro Tempore  House -Speaker |
| Florida | Senate - Rules Chair  House - In the order passed or reported from the preceding calendar or reading |
| Georgia | Senate - Rules Chair  House - Rules Chair, or Speaker |
| Hawaii | Senate - In the order reported from second reading  House - In the order reported from second reading |
| Idaho | Senate - In order reported from committee  House - In order reported from committee |
| Illinois | Senate - President, Rules Chair  House - Speaker, Rules Chair |
| Indiana | Senate - Leadership can deny a vote  House - Leadership can deny a vote |
| Iowa | Senate - Majority Leader  House - Majority Leader |
| Kansas | Senate - Rules Chair  House - In order by bill number |
| Kentucky | Senate - Rules Chair, President can dey vote  House - Rules Chair, Speaker can deny vote |
| Louisiana | Senate - President  House - Speaker |
| Maine | Senate - Ways and Means Chair  House - Ways and Means Chair |
| Michigan | Senate - In the order passed or reported from the preceding calendar or reading  House - In the order passed or reported from the preceding calendar or reading |
| Minnesota | Senate - In the order reported from committee  House - Rules and Legislative Administration Committee Chair |
| Mississippi | Senate - In order reported from committee  House - In order reported from committee |
| Missouri | Senate - President Pro Tempore  House -Speaker |
| Montana | Senate - In order by bill number  House - Speaker |
| Nebraska | Senate - Speaker |
| Nevada | Senate - In order reported from committee, also President  Assembly - In order reported from committee, also Speaker |
| New Hampshire | Senate - All legislation gets voted on  House - All legislation gets voted on |
| New Jersey | Senate - President  House - Speaker |
| New Mexico | Senate - Majority Floor Leader  House - Speaker |
| New York | Senate - Majority Leader  House - Speaker |
| North Carolina | Senate - President  House - Speaker |
| North Dakota | Senate - Majority Leader  House - Majority Leader |
| Ohio | Senate - Rules Chair  House - Rules Chair |
| Oklahoma | Senate - President  House - Speaker |
| Oregon | Senate - In order by bill number  House - in the order set by chamber rule |
| Pennsylvania | Senate - Majority Leader  House - Speaker |
| Rhode Island | Senate - Secretary of the Senate, President  House - Speaker |
| South Carolina | House - In the order reported from committee  Senate - In the order passed or reported from the preceding calendar or reading |
| South Dakota | Senate - Majority Leader  House - Speaker |
| Tennessee | Senate - Senate Calendar Committee  House - House Calendar and Rules Committee |
| Texas | Senate - In the order reported from committee, also Senate Calendar Committee Chair  House - House Calendar Committee Chair |
| Utah | Senate - In the order passed or reported from the preceding calendar or reading  House - Rules Chair |
| Vermont | Senate - Majority Leader  House - Speaker |
| Virginia | Senate - Clerk, President  House - Clerk, Speaker |
| Washington | Senate - Rules Chair  House - Rules Chair |
| West Virginia | Senate - In order by bill number, Rules Chair  House - In order by bill number, Rules Chair |
| Wisconsin | Senate - Committee on Senate Organization Chair  House - Rules Chair, Speaker |
| Wyoming | Senate - In order by bill number  House - In order by bill number |

# Various Oddities:

## California:

### Committees:

* Committees hold their hearings and votes on the same day
* Testimonies are 2 minutes long and video recorded
* Don’t need to sign up beforehand to testify
* Opposition testifies immediately after

### Appropriations:

* Senate Appropriations operates as a separate entity from House Appropriations and can slap a price tag on the bill that House Appropriations didn’t originally have

## 

## Indiana:

### Filling:

* Freshmen members of the legislature rarely propose any legislation their during their first session.

## Maryland:

### Committees:

* Judiciary committees does not tell anyone when they are voting on bills
* Testimony Tips:
  + Must show up and sign in for testimony in the beginning of the day. Ask if your lead sponsor can sign in for you and your friends
  + DO NOT rely on the Judiciary committee to be helpful
  + Hearings take 8-11 hours long, bring snacks and a phone charger

### Helpful Legislators:

* Susan Lee
* Shelly Hettleberg

### Terminology:

* 3rd reading = floor vote in Maryland

## Massachusetts:

### Committees:

* Joint House and Senate Judiciary

### Internal Politics:

* The two chambers ***hate*** each other, will pass bills to annoy/ pull rank on the other side
* Gretchen, Judiciary Counsel, is well respected in the Statehouse

## Nebraska

### Structure:

* Unicameral

## New Hampshire

### Structure:

* 400 members in House

### Executive Authority:

* Unlike most other states, the Governor shares executive power with the Executive Council, which the Governor chairs
* The Governor and Executive Council must concur on state contracts over $5,000, high-level agency appointments, and pardons.

## New York

### Committees:

* No hearings held

### Calendar:

* March is budget season

### Internal Politics:

* “Republican Gang”
* Governor v. Attorney General tension which can be leveraged

## Pennsylvania

### Tabling:

* In the House, all bills are laid on the table after they are reported from committee, except bills reported between June and September, which are automatically recommitted to the Rules Committee.
* Bills can be removed either by motion from the Majority Leader or after 15 days
* The House rules, website, and information staff are not helpful when it comes to giving information about the table process.
* Bills get bounced around and assigned to committees without much notice on the website, but there is an email to subscribe to.

## Tennessee

### Bill Limit

* Reps are limited to 15 bills a Session, Senators may propose unlimited. Because of this it is often easier to have a bill begin in the Senate.

## Vermont

### Internal Politics:

* Senate Judiciary Chair holds more power than Senate President
* Classic Senate versus House power struggle
* Barbara Rachelson is helpful