
Organization of the State Government

The government of the State of New Jersey, like that of the United States, is divided into three branches: the legislative, the executive and the judicial.

The principal function of the Legislature is to enact laws. The Executive branch, comprised of the Governor, Lieutenant Governor and State agencies, carries out the programs established by law. The Judiciary, which includes all courts, punishes violators and settles controversies and disputes. The Supreme Court is the final authority on the meaning and constitutionality of laws.

Legislators

The Legislature consists of two Houses, a 40-member Senate and an 80-member General Assembly. Each House has age and residency requirements for members.

Service in the Legislature is considered to be part-time and most legislators also hold other employment.

Legislative Districts

Legislators are elected from 40 legislative districts of substantially equal population. The voters in each district elect one Senator and two members of the General Assembly.

Every ten years, upon the results of the Federal census, the boundaries of the 40 districts are redrawn to maintain an equal population in each district.

Legislative Elections

Legislative elections are held in November of each odd-numbered year. Members of the General Assembly serve two-year terms. Senators serve for four years, except for the first term of a new decade, which is only two years. This 2-4-4 cycle allows for elections from new districts as soon as possible after reapportionment.

Interim appointments are made to fill vacant legislative seats by the county committee or committees of the party of the vacating legislator.

Legislative Organization

Each House elects a presiding officer—the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the General Assembly. They are second and third in line of succession to the governorship after the Lieutenant Governor and may serve as Acting Governor.

The President and the Speaker have broad powers

within their respective Houses. They decide the meeting schedules and the daily calendar of bills to be considered, preside over the sessions, appoint committee chairs and members, refer bills to committee for consideration and direct the business of their Houses.

Each party in each House also chooses a leader, assistant leaders and “whips.” Party leaders help develop party policy on the issues before the Legislature.

Each House establishes standing reference committees to review legislation specific to subject areas.

Much of the discussion on the merits of a bill takes place in committee. Representatives of interest groups and members of the public are generally given the opportunity to present their views at committee meetings.

Legislative Powers

The chief function of the Legislature is to enact laws. A proposal to make a new law, or to change or repeal an existing law, is presented to the Legislature as a bill. To become law, a bill must pass both Houses by a majority vote and be approved by the Governor. (*The chart on the reverse side presents the steps in the process.*)

The Legislature may also propose amendments to the New Jersey Constitution. The proposed amendment must be passed by a vote of three-fifths of each House before being placed on the ballot in November for a public vote. An amendment may also be presented to the voters if the Legislature passes it two years in a row by a simple majority vote.

Additional powers of the Legislature include:

- Enacting an annual appropriation bill outlining all State spending;
- Senatorial approval of the Governor’s appointments;
- Ratification of amendments to the U.S. Constitution;
- Judgment of the elections and qualification of its members;
- Institution and conduct of impeachment proceedings against State officials;
- Review of administrative rules and regulations.

Legislative Sessions

Each Legislature is in session for two years. All business conducted during the first year may be continued in the second year. At the end of the second year, all unfinished business expires.

Recently, the Legislature has met on Mondays and Thursdays. Other days may be devoted to committee

meetings and public hearings. Joint sessions are occasionally held, most often for an address by the Governor. Floor sessions and committee meetings are open to the public.

Resolutions

Resolutions primarily are used to express the sentiments of the members, create and empower temporary authorities and regulate internal legislative organization. A *joint resolution* must pass both Houses and be signed by the Governor. A *concurrent resolution* must pass both Houses, but is not presented to the Governor. A *simple resolution* is considered only by the House in which it is proposed.

Contacting Your Legislators

Legislators value the opinions and suggestions of their constituents. Through their professionally staffed district offices, legislators are prepared to respond to requests for information about legislative matters or provide assistance in dealing with State agencies.

You may call or write to legislators at their district offices. For a free directory call the toll-free number listed below, or write to them at:

c/o New Jersey Senate, State House
P.O. Box 099, Trenton, NJ 08625-0099 **or**

c/o New Jersey General Assembly, State House
P.O. Box 098, Trenton, NJ 08625-0098.

Legislative Information

The Legislative Information and Bill Room answers inquiries about bills and legislative procedures and provides copies of bills, meeting schedules and contact information.

Hours: 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. on business days and evening service during legislative sessions.

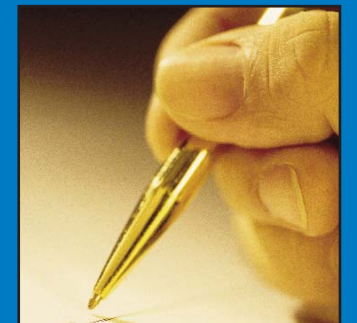
Phone: Toll-free in NJ: (800) 792-8630
Hearing Impaired: Dial 711 for NJ Relay

Address: Legislative Information and Bill Room
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THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS IN NEW JERSEY



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