

ILLINOIS LEGISLATURE

To be eligible to serve as a member of the General Assembly, a person must be a United States citizen, at least 21 years old and reside in the district being represented for at least two years prior to the election or appointment.

Functions & Powers

The legislative power of the State of Illinois is vested in the General Assembly, which is composed of a 59-member Senate and a 118-member House of Representatives. Its principal activities are enacting, amending or repealing laws, passing resolutions, adopting appropriation bills and conducting inquiries on proposed legislation. It also acts on amendments to the U.S. Constitution when they are submitted by Congress, and proposes and submits amendments to the Illinois Constitution for consideration by voters.

In addition to legislative responsibilities, the Senate is constitutionally delegated the responsibility of advising and consenting on most gubernatorial appointments to state offices, boards and commissions.

The General Assembly may impeach and convict executive and judicial officeholders in the State of Illinois. The House of Representatives has the sole power of impeachment, while the Senate serves as adjudicator. If a majority of the members of the House vote to impeach, the case proceeds to the Senate for trial. No officeholder may be convicted and removed from office without a two-thirds guilty vote from the Senate. The Senate may not, however, impose any punishment on an impeached and convicted officeholder other than removal from office.

Organization & Composition

Each legislative district is composed of one senate district, which is divided into two representative districts. Every two years, one Representative is elected from each representative district for a two-year term.

Members of the General Assembly are elected in the general election in even-numbered years. Senate districts are divided into three groups, and one or two groups are elected every two years. Senators from one group are elected for terms of four years, four



Illinois Senate chamber



Illinois House of Representatives chamber

years and two years; another group serves for terms of four years, two years and four years; and the third group is elected for terms of two years, four years and four years.

In January of the odd-numbered year following the November general election, the Secretary of State presides over the House until the members have elected a Speaker. In the Senate, the Governor presides until the Senators have elected a President. Various other leaders and officers are selected by the Speaker and President as well as Minority Leaders in both the House and Senate to serve in leadership positions.

Bills may originate in either the House or the Senate and must be passed by a majority of all elected members before being sent to the Governor. Either chamber may amend or reject any bill. During recent sessions, about 5,000 to 7,000 bills have been introduced in each biennium. However, the total number of bills enacted is much smaller.

As the nature and number of proposed bills have increased, the General Assembly has established numerous committees and commissions in an effort to concentrate on specific subject areas.

Legislative Cycle

The General Assembly convenes each year on the second Wednesday in January. The Governor's State of the State message to the legislature is delivered early in the session. The legislative work schedule during the spring typically is laden with heavy committee schedules, extended plenary sessions, controversial budget issues and reconciling differences in substantive bills between the two chambers.

Constitutional provisions, formal rules and parliamentary procedures provide basic guidelines and relative stability to both chambers as the General Assembly acts on legislation. Any bill passed after May 31 cannot take effect until June 1 of the following year unless the bill passes both the House and Senate by a three-fifths vote. The General Assembly adjourns at the end of May and reconvenes for two weeks in October or November to consider the Governor's vetoes.

At other times, special sessions may be convened by the Governor or by a joint proclamation by the presiding officers of both chambers. This proclamation confines legislative deliberation to specific subjects, and no other matters except confirmations of appointments and impeachments may be considered by General Assembly members.