



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Information Sheet No. 6 How a Bill Becomes Law

A bill is a proposed law. To become a law (also called an act or statute) a bill must pass through five legislative stages, as explained below.

Introduction and First Reading

This stage takes place during the Daily Routine when the Speaker calls for 'Introduction of Bills.' All other bill stages take place during Orders of the Day. A cabinet minister who has a bill to introduce will rise at this time and say, "Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill Number __, entitled (name of the bill) be now introduced and read a first time." The procedure is the same for a private member's bill, except that it is only introduced by name, as the bill number will be assigned later by the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly. There is no debate on the bill at this point. Once a bill passes First Reading it is placed on the Order Paper, the Assembly's agenda.

Second Reading

Second reading is the stage at which the House debates the bill in principle. When a bill is called for second reading the bill's sponsor (the member who introduced the bill) will rise and say, "Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill Number __, entitled (bill name) be now read a second time."

The sponsor now has unlimited time to speak about the bill. When the sponsor is done speaking another member (one from the other side of the Assembly) will also have unlimited time to speak. All other members have a maximum of 20 minutes speaking time. Once all members who wish to speak have spoken the sponsor has 20 minutes to speak again and close debate. This time limit is 40 minutes for Second Reading of a main appropriation (budget) bill.

Once debate ends the Speaker asks the Members if they are 'prepared for the question' (ready to vote). If they are, the Speaker will ask if they agree with the motion for second reading. By listening to the voice vote the Speaker will determine if the bill has the support of the majority and has passed second reading. At this point two members may rise in their places and call for a 'division' – a recorded vote. The Speaker will then ring the division bells to let members inside the Assembly and outside know that a recorded vote will be taken. Once the Speaker has turned off the bells the Speaker will ask the Clerk to poll each member present, and each member will rise in their turn and state whether they "agree" or "disagree" with the motion for second reading. Once all members present have voted the Clerk announces the result and the Speaker declares the motion for second reading carried or defeated.

Committee Stage

The second reading motion can be amended to refer a bill to a standing, select or special committee after it has received second reading. That rarely happens. Instead, the Assembly follows Standing Order 57(4) which says once a bill “is read the second time, it stands ordered for consideration by Committee of the Whole.” In either case, the committee stage is where a bill is examined clause by clause. Budget bills are also examined department by department. Though amendments (changes) can be proposed at this stage they must be consistent with the principle of the bill that was approved at second reading. During the committee stage members can speak as often as they wish, for a maximum of 20 minutes each time. Once a committee has ended consideration of a bill the committee Chair will report the committee’s decision, orally or in writing, to the Legislative Assembly.

Third Reading

At this stage the Assembly considers the bill in its final form, including amendments made during the committee stage. The bill’s sponsor begins third reading by moving “that Bill Number __, entitled (bill name), be now read a third time and do pass.” Members can then debate and vote on the bill in the same way as at second reading. Bills often pass third reading without debate, if there were no amendments at the committee stage. If, when the bill is called for third reading or during third reading debate, the Assembly believes a bill requires further amendment it may ‘recommit’ the bill to the committee stage. This rarely happens.

Assent

Once a bill receives third reading and passes the House it is ready for Assent. The Assent ceremony begins when the Commissioner enters the Chamber and takes the Speaker’s chair. The Speaker, standing to the Commissioner’s right, will, on behalf of the Assembly, ask the Commissioner to grant Assent to the bills that have passed the House. The Clerk of the Assembly will then read out the names of the bills. The Commissioner will then “assent to the bills as enumerated by the Clerk.” Those bills are now laws. There is always an Assent ceremony on the final day of a Spring or Fall Sitting, but Assent can happen during a Sitting, as well.

Most laws come into effect upon Assent. However, some bills specify that the whole bill, or parts of it, will come into force on a future specified date, a retroactive specified date, or a future, unspecified date to be decided by the Commissioner in Executive Council (the cabinet).

For more information please see the Legislative Assembly’s website:
<https://yukonassembly.ca/>