Acts of Assembly

Those bills passed by the General Assembly and signed by the Governor. An act is given a number which represents the numerical sequence in which the bill was signed. This number refers to the "Chapter" of the Acts of Assembly, i.e., Senate Bill 79 became Chapter 23 of the Acts of Assembly, being the twenty-third bill signed into law by the Governor. After the Session, all acts are bound into volumes referred to as the Acts of Assembly. Joint resolutions amending the Constitution of Virginia are also assigned Chapter numbers, but are not signed by the Governor, and are placed in the Acts of Assembly.

Adjournment

Termination of a Session for that day, with the hour and day of the next meeting being set prior to adjournment.

Adjournment Sine Die

The final adjournment of a legislative Session. The Latin translation is "without a day, an indefinite period."

Amendment

A change made to legislation in committee or on the chamber floor that adds to, revises, or deletes language from the legislation.

Amendment, Constitutional

A joint resolution that affects the Constitution and is passed by two General Assembly Sessions separated by a general election of the House of Delegates. At the second Session, a bill must also be passed to place the proposal on a ballot. Final approval is given by voters at a general election.

Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute

A substantive redrafting of legislation that incorporates the changes in a new version referred to as a "substitute." An amendment in the nature of a substitute may be offered by a standing committee, on the chamber floor by a member, by a conference committee, or by the Governor.

Biennium

A two-year term of legislative activity, usually used in association with the budget.

Bill

A proposal to amend, repeal, or add sections to the Code of Virginia or the Acts of Assembly.

Bill Status (Legislative Information System)

The database system for tracking legislation and the daily activities of the House of Delegates and the Senate.

Budget Bill

Recommended appropriations of state revenue presented by the Governor to the General Assembly for its consideration during the legislative Session.

By Request

A member may add "by request" to his/her name when introducing a bill, which indicates that the bill has been introduced at the request of a constituent, a governmental agency, or an organization.

Calendar

The daily printed agenda of business for each house. The Calendar also contains scheduled committee meetings and public hearings.

Caucus

An informal meeting of a group of members, most often called on the basis of party affiliation or regional representation.

Chapter

A bill passed and signed into law by the Governor. The term also applies to constitutional amendments passed by the General Assembly and to bills passed notwithstanding the Governor's objections or amendments.

Charter Bill

Legislation relating to powers of counties, cities, and towns specifically granted by the General Assembly. Charters, and changes thereto, are not codified and are found only in the Acts of Assembly.

Code of Virginia

A compilation of the laws of the Commonwealth that is arranged alphabetically by subject, with each subject heading being referred to as a "Title."

Committee

A group of legislators from the House of Delegates or the Senate organized for the purpose of considering and deciding on the disposition of legislation.

Committee Actions

Carry Over (Continue) – Action which removes the measure from consideration during an even-numbered year Session and provides for its reconsideration at the next regular Session of the General Assembly. No bill may be carried over in an odd-numbered year Session. A carry-over bill retains its assigned bill number in the odd-numbered year Session.

Fail to Report (Defeat) – The committee rejects a motion to report a bill to the full house.

Incorporate – The committee incorporates one or more bills into another bill.

No Action Taken – No motion is made on the bill and it dies at the time of the committee deadline.

Pass By Indefinitely (PBI) – This action allows the committee to reconsider legislation at a later meeting. If the committee takes no further action, the bill is "dead."

Report – The majority of the committee approves the bill and it is reported to the floor. The bill may be reported three ways: without amendment(s), with amendment(s), or with an amendment in the nature of a substitute. A bill may also be reported and referred to another committee.

Strike – The bill is removed from the docket. This action frequently occurs at the request of the patron.

Committee Docket

A list prepared by the committee clerk of all legislation pending before a standing committee or a subcommittee. The order in which bills are taken up is determined by the chairman of the committee.

Conference Committee

An even number of legislators, half of them from the House and half of them from the Senate, who meet to resolve differences between versions of a specific bill or joint resolution passed by their respective bodies. This usually includes three members from each body.

Conflict of Interest

A position taken by a legislator on a matter that threatens the legislator's ability to vote impartially due to some personal interest in a legislative issue (pursuant to House Rule 69 or Senate Rule 36).

Constituent

A citizen residing within the district of a legislator.

Constitution

A written instrument embodying the fundamental principles of the state that guarantees powers and duties of the government and certain rights to the people.

Dillon Rule

Restricts the authority of local governments with respect to the enactment of ordinances. Local governments only have powers granted by the Constitution of Virginia and/or passed by the General Assembly.

Division

A method of voting; a request that members stand or raise hands to be counted when the outcome of a voice vote is unclear or in dispute.

Docket

A list of all legislation that is pending before a standing committee, prepared by the committee clerk (See Committee Docket).

Effective Date

Date on which a Chapter of the Acts of Assembly becomes a law. Laws become effective July 1 in the year they are passed, unless otherwise specified. Laws passed at a special Session become effective on the first day of the fourth month following adjournment, unless otherwise specified.

Emergency Clause

Due to an emergency, the law becomes effective when signed by the Governor.

Engrossed

A stage in the legislative process when a bill passes the second reading in the house of origin. If amended, the engrossed version of the legislation is printed incorporating all amendments that are agreed to. If not amended, the introduced version of the legislation becomes the engrossed bill, and if an amendment in the nature of a substitute is agreed to, the substitute becomes the engrossed bill.

Enrolled

Legislation which has passed both the House of Delegates and the Senate. It has been signed by the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate and it has been sent to the Governor, but not yet signed. If signed by the Governor, the bill becomes a law and a Chapter of the Acts of Assembly.

Fiscal Year

A 12-month accounting period used in the State Budget. In Virginia, the fiscal year begins July 1 and ends June 30 of the following year.

Floor

That portion of the chamber reserved for members, staff, and other persons granted access during the Session.

Floor Leader

Refers to majority and minority leadership in each house.

Gallery

Balconies of each chamber from which visitors may view the proceedings.

Germaneness

The relevance or appropriateness of amendments or substitutes.

Interim

The interval between annual Sessions.

Journal

The compilation of legislative actions and proceedings of the House of Delegates and the Senate which are published by their respective Clerk's office. The Journal is the official record of each legislative body.

Leave of Absence

Permission granted to a member to be absent for a day.

Legislative Intent

The purpose for which a measure is introduced and/or passed.

Legislator

An elected member of a legislative body.

Legislature (General Assembly)
The branch of state government responsible for enacting laws.

Lobbyist
A person who represents a particular interest or group of interests before the General Assembly.

Majority Leader
A member of the majority party designated to be its floor leader.

Majority Party
The political party having the greater number of members in either house of the legislature.

Minority Leader
A member of the minority party designated to be its floor leader.

Minority Party
The political party having the fewer number of members in either house of the legislature.

Minute Book
A document consisting of the condensed daily floor actions of the Senate, committee reports, and communications.

Minutes
A document consisting of the condensed daily floor actions of the House of Delegates, committee reports, and communications.

Morning Hour
A period at the beginning of each day's Session when members may introduce distinguished visitors to their colleagues or speak on any subject by asking for a "Point of Personal Privilege."

Parliamentary Inquiry
A question posed to the presiding officer for clarification of a point in the proceedings.

Patron
A legislator who introduces a specific piece of legislation. Other legislators may show their support by signing on as co-patrons.

Reading
The presentation of a bill before either house requiring the reading and printing of the bill title. This formal procedure is required by the Constitution and the Rules of each house and indicates to the legislators and the public a stage in the enactment of a measure. The Constitution requires that bills receive three readings or three printings by title on three different days in each house, unless the readings are waived.

Reapportionment
A redrawing of legislative district boundaries every ten years to provide equality of representation according to population.

Recommittal
In the Senate, this is the reassignment of legislation to the last committee that considered it.

Reconsideration
A motion which, when granted, results in another vote annulling or reaffirming an action previously taken. Such a motion may be offered only by a member having voted previously on the prevailing side.

Reconvened Session
A Session held on the sixth Wednesday after adjournment of each regular or special Session when the legislature meets to consider and act on bills vetoed by the Governor and bills with recommendations by the Governor.

Referendum
A method by which a measure adopted by the legislature may be submitted to the voters.

Referral
The assignment of legislation to a committee. In the House of Delegates, referral is initially done by the Speaker of the House. In the Senate it is done by the Clerk of the Senate.

Rereferral
In the House of Delegates, this is the reassignment of legislation to the last committee that considered it. Rereferral is initiated by a member from the floor and a vote is taken. In the Senate rereferral is the reassignment of legislation to another committee. It is done by the committee that is considering it or by a member from the floor.

Resolution
Legislation which requests a study, or expresses legislative opinion or sentiment on a particular issue. Resolutions do not have the force of law and do not require the signature of the Governor. Constitutional amendments, however, are signed by the presiding officer of each house and are assigned chapter numbers.

Session
The period of time for which the legislature meets. In even-numbered years, the Session meets for 60 days; in odd-numbered years it meets for 30 days. The Session may be extended for a maximum of 30 days. The odd-numbered year Sessions are usually extended to 46 days.

Standing Committees
Regular committees of the legislature set up to perform certain legislative functions, and to consider legislation regarding certain areas of the law.

Subcommittee
A group of legislators who are members of a standing committee selected by the committee chairman to consider certain categories of bills. Subcommittees make recommendations to the full committee.

Sunset
The expiration date of a legislative measure.

Suspension of the Rules
Parliamentary procedure whereby actions can be taken which would otherwise be out of order. A 2/3 vote is required to suspend the rules.

Veto
Action by which the Governor refuses to sign legislation passed by the General Assembly. The Governor returns the vetoed bill to its house of origin. A 2/3 vote of each body is required to overturn a veto.

Vote
Formal expression of will or decision by the legislative body.

Vote, En Bloc
The disposition of several items, such as a series of bills or amendments, by taking one vote.

Vote, Recorded
A roll call vote in which each member electronically votes yea, nay, or abstain. The vote is recorded in the Journal of each legislative body.

Vote, Voice
Oral expression of the members when a question is submitted for their determination. Response is given by "yeas" and "nays," and the presiding officer states his/her decision as to which side prevails.

Yield
The relinquishing of the floor by one member to another member to speak or ask a question during debate.

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Virginia General Assembly Pocket Glossary

A Guide to Legislative Terms



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