



How Citizens Can Change Public Policy—

STEPS IN THE AUTHORIZING PROCESS AND HOW CITIZENS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE



How a bill becomes a law

Step 1: Drafting a bill: Any senator or representative can develop a bill. The president of the United States, a private citizen, a business or trade association, or an organization such as the National Psoriasis Foundation may request that a bill be prepared and may even help draft it.

Step 2: Introducing the bill:

A senator or representative sponsors a bill, which is assigned a number. Senate bills start with “S” (e.g., S. 1234). House of Representative bills start with “H.R.” (H.R. 5678). The bill’s title, sponsors, co-sponsors (other Members of Congress who support the bill) and introductory remarks are published in the Congressional Record, which records the daily proceedings of the House and Senate (www.gpoaccess.gov/crecord/index.html). Bill updates can be found on www.Thomas.loc.gov by number or topic (such as “psoriasis”).

Step 3: Referring the bill to committee & subcommittee:

The Secretary of the Senate and Clerk of the House assign a bill to the appropriate committee(s). Bills can then be referred to appropriate subcommittees, which focus on particular issues. Example: The Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis Research, Cure and Care Act has been referred to the House Energy and Commerce Committee and then to its health subcommittee.



How Advocates Can Make a Difference

Individuals and organizations can approach their elected officials with issues and concerns, and work with them to develop a proposed bill. Example: The National Psoriasis Foundation, on behalf of the psoriasis community, approached Rep. David Wu (D-Ore.) regarding the Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis Research, Cure and Care Act.

ACTION TIP:

E-mail Members of Congress with information about the lack of—and need for—psoriasis research. Ask them to take action!



Before a bill is introduced, individuals and organizations can work to line up co-sponsors. Co-sponsors are listed along with the original sponsor on the bill’s text and are called “original co-sponsors.”

ACTION TIP:

Meet with and/or call elected officials and their staff to explain the need for the bill. Tell them how the bill will impact their community. Request the official to become an original co-sponsor



Ideally, some of the original co-sponsors serve on the committee considering the bill. This increases the chances of the bill moving forward. Advocates can target elected officials who serve on the committee considering the bill, encouraging them to support the bill as a co-sponsor (ideally as an original co-sponsor).

To find out which committees are considering which bills—and the committees’ members—visit www.house.gov or www.senate.gov. Because bills are referred to committees by the Office of the Clerk of the House and Senate, and each chamber’s parliamentarians, advocates usually cannot influence the referral process.

To learn more about co-sponsorship, visit: www.rules.house.gov/CRS_Rpt/RS22477.pdf or lieberman.senate.gov/documents/crs/senatebillsponsorship.pdf

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Step 4: Co-sponsoring the bill: Anytime after it is introduced and until it starts moving through the legislative process, Members of Congress can add their names as a bill's co-sponsors. Staff of the Member of Congress who decides to co-sponsor a bill contacts the lead sponsor's office to ask to be added to the list of co-sponsors.

Co-sponsors can be added only when Congress is in session. It can take more than a week for the official's name to show up on the formal list of co-sponsors at Thomas.loc.gov, and longer if Congress is in recess.

Typically, committee chairmen/chairwomen and ranking Members do not co-sponsor bills their committees are considering. In general, House and Senate leaders only co-sponsor measures that are top priorities for their respective parties.

Step 5. Subcommittee hearing and mark up:

Subcommittees may hold hearings on a bill and invite testimony from public and private witnesses. Individuals or organizations, such as the Psoriasis Foundation, may testify, submit a written statement to be included in the hearing's official record or distribute a press statement or other materials at the hearing.

Once these hearings are completed, the subcommittee usually meets to "mark up" a bill - that is, to consider changes and amendments to the bill's text. Members review the measure line by line, "marking it up" with changes. They then vote on whether to favorably report the bill to the full committee. If not favorably reported, the bill usually dies.



ACTION TIP:

Organize grassroots contacts from the district or state to ask the committee chairman for a hearing or mark up of the bill. Line up subcommittee Members who will vote for the measure. Citizens can contact their Members of Congress, asking them to ask the committee chairman for a hearing. Do this cautiously and only after trying other actions. The Psoriasis Foundation staff can guide you on appropriate strategies at this stage.

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Typically, a bill's lead sponsor circulates a "Dear Colleague" letter to inform fellow representatives/senators about the measure and ask them to co-sponsor it.

Right after a bill is introduced, organizations and advocates can use this "Dear Colleague" message to build support. They can issue action alerts to grassroots activists who then contact Members of Congress to ask their senators and representative to sign the "Dear Colleague." This is a chance to educate the committee's Members and staff.



ACTION TIP:

E-mail Members of Congress with information about the lack of—and need for—psoriasis research. Ask them to take action!

A committee's chairman/chairwoman controls which issues are discussed in hearings and which bills are "marked-up" (revised) at both subcommittee and full committee levels. Thus, the chairman and his/her staff are essential to the bill's prospects. Subcommittee heads can propose bills but the head of the full committee must agree for the bill to proceed. Chairmen of the full committees are attracted to bills that have a number of co-sponsors from the committee considering the bill. They believe these bills are likely to be easier to manage.

A bill's advocates need to work with the staff of both the subcommittee and committee staff to educate them about the issues the bill addresses, and line up committee Members willing to ask the chairman to hold a hearing and/or mark up the bill.

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Step 6: Full committee hearing and mark up:

Once a bill is reported to the full committee, the committee may repeat any or all of the subcommittee's procedures, including hearings, mark up and a vote. If the committee votes favorably on a bill, it is sent, along with the committee's report, to either the full Senate, or full House, for consideration. The committee report includes the origin, purpose, content, impact and estimated cost of the proposed bill.



ACTION TIP:

Keep up phone calls, e-mails and visits to Members of Congress to press for a hearing or mark up and/or to line up Members of the committee considering the bill to vote for it.

Step 7: Floor consideration and full chamber vote:

Once the bill is reported out of committee, it is placed on the calendar for consideration and additional debate. Prior to reaching the House or Senate floor, leaders determine the debate's parameters (e.g., how long the debate will last, how many amendments may be offered). The measure is then brought up for consideration by all the Members. At this stage, the bill may be amended, voted up or down, referred back to committee, or tabled. Should either of the two latter options occur, the bill usually dies. Generally, a majority vote (half of all Members present voting in the affirmative, plus one) is necessary for the legislation to pass or be enacted. There are two exceptions:

1. The House of Representatives has a "suspension calendar," where bills not expected to have much opposition are placed. In exchange for expedited consideration, two-thirds of all Members present must vote to pass the items.
2. The Senate generally allows longer time for debate than the House. Sometimes Senate leaders want to stop debate and move for a vote on contentious measures. To do this, the Senate leadership files a "cloture" (closing of debate) motion. Sixty votes are required to pass the cloture motion and cut off debate.

How Advocates Can Make a Difference

If a bill is approved by the subcommittee, it is usually "reported out" of the full committee within a few days. But if questions or controversy arise, advocates may organize grassroots supporters to contact the committee chairman and/or Members of the committee to push for a full committee hearing or mark up, and to line up Members who will vote for the bill. Advocates can also organize to oppose any threats to change the bill.

Although a bill may have been reported out of committee, in the House, more than one committee may have jurisdiction over the issue. As a result, the process needs to be repeated with additional Members and panels.

Even though a bill may pass out of committee(s), it is not guaranteed that it will be brought to the House or Senate floor. Sometimes House and/or Senate leaders do not support the issue addressed by the bill and opt not to schedule a full chamber vote. Sometimes other matters have a higher priority.

In these cases, advocates can reach out to House and Senate leaders—and their staff Members—to explain why the bill must be brought forward. They should work with the bill's lead sponsor and key co-sponsors to put pressure the leadership for a full chamber vote.



ACTION TIP:

Place calls, send e-mails and find other ways to urge Members of Congress to vote in favor of a bill and/or oppose a weaker alternative that may be offered by the opposition.

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Step 8: Consideration by the other chamber.

After a bill is passed by the Senate or House, it is referred to the other chamber for consideration. For more information about how each chamber handles legislation, visit www.house.gov or www.senate.gov.

ACTION TIP:

Following passage in one chamber, advocates often issue a “call to action” by grassroots supporters to contact Members of the other chamber to help propel the measure forward.

Step 9: Conference committee: To be sent to the President for enactment into law, the House and Senate must pass the House and Senate in *identical* form.

If differences exist between the Senate and House versions, the Senate president and speaker of the House usually appoint a conference committee to resolve the differences.

A conference committee is generally composed of senators and representatives of both parties who were on committees that originally considered the legislation. These “conferees” debate the differences between the two bills and develop uniform legislation. If they cannot agree, the bill usually dies.

If the Senate president and House speaker fail to name conference committee conferees, the bill dies.

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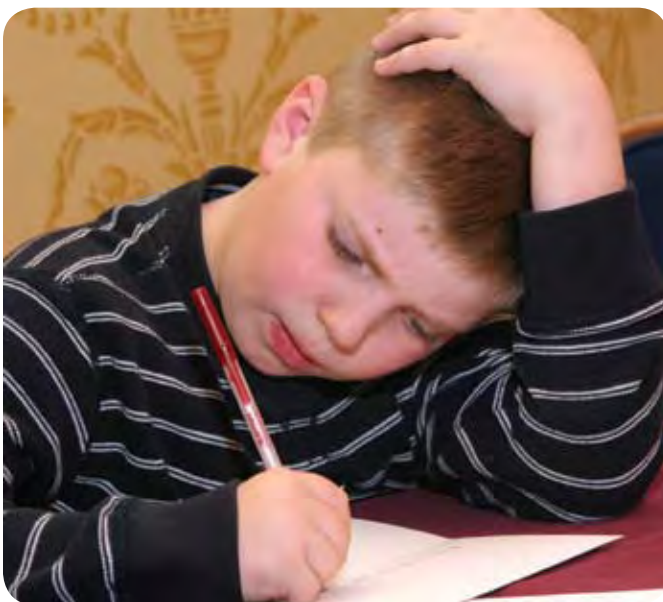
Ideally, advocacy activities described above are pursued at the same time in both the House and the Senate. That way, when a bill passes one chamber, it is well-positioned for easy consideration in the other body.

Organizations and advocates need to communicate often with their lead champions in the House and Senate to be certain that the key provisions they want and need in the final legislation are secured.



ACTION TIP:

Meetings, e-mails, and calls to the offices of the conferees from their constituents, urging their support of particular provisions, or opposition of certain components, are essential. Also, organizations and advocates often work with the bill sponsors, lead cosponsors, and key conferees to develop messages, strategy, and—if necessary—a compromise.



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Step 10: Consideration of uniform legislation by House & Senate: If the conferees agree on a bill, the revised bill (now a “uniform measure”) and a conference report are sent back to the Senate and House for a final vote.

For the measure to be sent to the President, both the Senate and House must approve the compromise conference committee bill—without any modifications—by a majority vote.

ACTION TIP:

Advocates must use the excellent relationships they have built with their Members during this long process. E-mails, calls and visits are an important way to educate elected officials about the urgent need for a vote on the bill. Again, careful strategizing is important. The Psoriasis Foundation can guide you.

Step 11: Sent to the president: If the bill has made it this far, it goes to the president for consideration.

The President has four options:

1. **sign the bill into law;**
2. **take no action for 10 days**, while Congress is in session, which also will make it a law;
3. **take no action** either when Congress is adjourned or at the end of the second session of Congress, which results in a “**pocket veto**,” killing the bill; or
4. **veto the bill.** If the President vetoes a bill, Congress may attempt to override the veto. This requires a two-thirds vote by both the Senate and House. If either chamber fails to get the two-thirds vote, the bill dies. If both succeed, the bill becomes law.

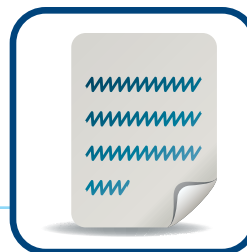
How Advocates Can Make a Difference

If advocates agree to the compromise measure that comes out of the conference committee, they will work to ensure that it will pass when it comes before the House and Senate for a final vote.

If the conference report is controversial in any way, advocates may need to work with House and Senate leaders to pressure them to bring the final bill forward for a vote. If the final bill is not agreeable to advocates but is being brought forward for a final vote, advocates may wish to work with representatives and senators on a “motion to recommit,” which, if passed, would essentially kill the bill.

Organizations and advocates may send e-mails, make calls or otherwise weigh in with the White House to urge the president to enact or veto the measure. Advocates also can contact their representatives and senators and urge them to contact the White House to support—or oppose—the measure.

If the president vetoes a bill that advocates support, they can e-mail and call their Members of Congress to urge them to vote to override the President’s veto.





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