

Glossary of Legislative Terms

This page is intended to be a resource of common definitions of terms used in the Delaware General Assembly and the United State Congress. This listing is in no way a complete listing of all terms used.

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ACT

In Delaware - A [bill](#) that has passed both houses of the General Assembly in identical form and becomes law, with or without the Governor's signature. A "general act" has form application throughout the State, while a "local act" applies only to a specific city or county.

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ADJOURNMENT

Suspension of a legislative session. "Adjournment until a day certain" is a temporary suspension of proceedings during a session, while "adjournment sine die" marks the final closing of a session.

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AMENDMENT

A proposal by a Member (in committee or floor session of the respective Chamber) to alter the language or provision of a [bill](#) or [act](#). It is voted on in the same manner as a [bill](#).

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APPROPRIATION

A budget [act](#) that authorizes the spending of public money for specific purposes.

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BILL

A proposed law. Bills usually propose changes or additions to the existing statutory law, but can also create new [law](#).

In Delaware, a Senate Bill begins with "SB" and a House Bill begins with "HB", which is followed by the numerical number that is assigned.

In the US Congress, a Senate Bill begins with "S" and a House Bill begins with "HR", which is followed by the numerical number that is assigned.

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CALENDAR

A daily listing of the [Bills](#) and [Resolutions](#) which have been reported from [Committee](#) and are ready for final reading, debate, and voting by the full membership of a house.

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CAUCUS

A group of legislators who associate together on the basis of membership in a political party or common interests, and meet to discuss policy and strategy and coordinate their legislative efforts.

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CLERK OF THE HOUSE

In Delaware - Is the chief administrative officer of the House of Representatives. Though not a Representative, the Clerk is a full-time staff official whose duties include: Receiving and printing all bills introduced in the House, recording all votes taken on the floor, and certifying the daily record of legislative action on bills and resolutions.

In the US House of Representatives - The Clerk is the chief legislative official in the House of Representatives who serves a year term. The Clerk organizes the House at the beginning of each new Congress, oversees the operation of the House Floor, and maintains its official records, including roll call votes.

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CODE

A collection of a government's statutes and their revisions. A state's code is usually found in a series of volumes according to subject matter and is usually by title, chapter, and section.

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COMMITTEE

Committees of Delaware General Assembly Legislators include:

(a) A "**Standing Committee**" studies proposed legislation in some general field of legislative activity (e.g., Agriculture, Education and Health) and recommends to the full membership whether that legislation should be supported or not supported. Also see US Congress Standing Committees (below).

(b) An "**Interim Committee**" is appointed to meet between legislative sessions to study a particular problem and report back to the full membership.

(c) A "**Committee of the Whole**" is the designation for either the Senate or the House of Representatives when the entire membership meets as a committee to study matters under that chamber's rules relaxed to permit more informal discussion. Also see US House of Representatives Committee of the Whole (below).

Committees of US Congress Representative and Senators include:

Standing Committees - Congressional standing committees are permanent panels comprised of Members of a Chamber. Each panel has jurisdiction over measures and laws in certain areas of public policy, such as health, education, energy, the environment, foreign affairs, and agriculture. Committees meet with witnesses and experts who help Members gain expertise about a wide range of topics. In their committee meetings and hearings, Members are informed about issues relevant to the proposed law. Guided by a Chairperson, committee members ask questions about the testimony of witnesses, exhibits, photographs, demonstrations, and other materials presented in hearings. Committees may write a first draft of a bill and then rewrite the bill several times or revise the bill in a markup session before voting on it. As a bill proceeds through Congress, it may pass from one committee to another or go directly to the House Floor.

Select Committees - Select committees are usually established by the House or the Senate for limited periods and limited purposes. After completing its assigned task, for example, investigating a Government activity and writing a report, the select committee dissolves. In most cases, select committees do not report bills to be sent to the full House or Senate.

Joint Committees - Joint committees are those whose Members are chosen from both the House and Senate. In general, joint committees do not have the authority to consider or report legislation to the House or the Senate. The joint committees are the Joint Economic Committee, the Joint Committee on the Library, the Joint Committee on Printing, and the Joint Committee on Taxation.

US House of Representatives Committee of the Whole - The Committee of the Whole refers to the way most bills are debated in the House of Representatives (House). The Committee of the Whole, technically a committee on which all Representatives serve, was created to expedite consideration of legislation on the Floor. The Speaker of the House can declare the House resolved into the Committee of the Whole on authority of a House resolution. Such a resolution, reported by the Rules Committee, sets the guidelines or "Rule" for considering a bill. Consideration of a bill or resolution in the Committee of the Whole involves a period of time (usually 1 hour) for general debate on the merits of the bill or resolution. After general debate, Members may offer amendments, with each speech for or against an amendment being limited to 5 minutes. When the amending process is completed, the Committee of the Whole dissolves and rises to report its actions to the House through the Speaker. The House then votes on whether to adopt the amendments recommended by the Committee of the Whole and on the final passage of the measure, as amended. The US Senate no longer uses the Committee of the Whole.

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CONSTITUENT

A citizen residing within the district of a legislator.

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CONSTITUTIONAL MAJORITY

The Delaware Constitution requires a majority of the entire membership (regardless of how many are actually present) to vote for the passage of [bills](#) and resolutions that will have the effect of law. In contrast, many

[motions](#) on procedural matters require only a "simple majority", or a majority of those present and voting.

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ENROLLMENT/ ENGROSSMENT

Preparation of a [bill](#) in its final and official form to show the precise language of the measure passed by both houses.

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FILIBUSTER

A technique used by the US Senate to delay or prevent legislative action by speaking at great length against a pending measure.

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HEARING

A meeting or session of a [Committee](#) of Congress or the Delaware General Assembly, usually open to the public, to obtain information and opinions on proposed legislation, conduct an investigation, or oversee a program.

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JOURNAL

The official record of legislative proceedings in each house.

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LAW

A general term, usually used for official [Acts](#) and [Statutes](#) of the legislature.

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL RESEARCH DIVISION

The staff office that provides bill drafting, legal counseling, reference bill service and other legal assistance and services to members of the Delaware General Assembly and public.

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LEGISLATURE

The lawmaking body of government. In Delaware it is the Delaware General Assembly. In the United States of America it is the United State Congress.

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L.O.T./LAID ON TABLE

L.O.T. refers to Laid on Table. Also referred to as Tabling [Motion](#), which is a motion to stop action on a pending proposal and to lay it aside indefinitely.

In Delaware the Speaker of the House or the Senate Pro Tempore can table a bill, which stops action on the bill indefinitely. A Delaware Legislator within that house of the General Assembly, may make a motion to lift a bill from the table for consideration.

In the US Congress, when the Senate or House agrees to a tabling motion, the measure which has been tabled is effectively defeated.

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LOBBYING

Attempts by a person or group acting on behalf of others to influence legislation ([Bill](#) or [Resolution](#)).

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MAJORITY LEADER

That member chosen by each house majority party caucus to manage the passage of those bills it favors.

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MARKUP

A term used in the US Congress meaning to change or alter the language of a bill.

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MOTION

A formal proposal made by a legislator to take some type of procedural action, such as, adjourning or holding a roll call vote.

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE

The title of President of the Senate refers to the presiding officer in the Senate, held by the Lieutenant Governor in Delaware, and the Vice President in the US Senate.

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PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The Senator elected by the other members to replace the President in case of absence, disability or resignation. The President Pro Tempore appoints all members to standing committees.

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QUORUM

The minimum number of members required to be present to perform house business.

In the General Assembly, the quorum for each house is a majority of its total members.

In Congress - 218 members are needed in the House of Representatives for a Quorum; however, only 100 members are needed to conduct business under the Committee of the Whole. 51 members are needed in the Senate for a Quorum.

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RESOLUTION

A resolution is the formal expression of the opinion, sentiment or will, of one or both Houses of the General Assembly. The US Congress also has the same type of resolutions. There are three types of resolutions: **SIMPLE RESOLUTIONS** - A simple resolution is a motion of the house, and deals with the internal affairs of that house only. The effect of its passage does not go beyond the bounds and the authority of that house.

CONCURRENT RESOLUTIONS - A concurrent resolution is used to accomplish the same purpose in relation to the entire legislature that a simple resolution accomplishes for either the House or Senate singly. A concurrent resolution adopted by the legislature does not become a statute, nor does it have the force and effect of law, nor can it be used for any purpose that requires the exercise of legislative power.

JOINT RESOLUTIONS - A joint resolution is the most formal, and is addressed to matters that are not the internal affairs of either house individually, nor the internal affairs of the General Assembly as a whole. It is of no legal effect unless it is passed by both Houses and signed by the Governor. A joint resolution is not a law but is used to employ temporary measures and has the force of law while in effect.

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ROLL CALL

A call of the roll in the House or the Senate to determine whether a quorum is present, to establish a quorum, or to vote on a question. Used in the US Congress and the Delaware General Assembly.

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RULES OF EACH HOUSE

The procedural rules or guidelines adopted by each house to govern its legislative conduct and action.

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SECRETARY OF THE SENATE

In Delaware - The chief administrative officer of the Senate, equivalent to the Clerk of the House, with the same status and duties.

In the US Senate - Secretary of the Senate is the elected official of the Senate responsible for management of many legislative and administrative services. The Secretary is the disbursing officer for the Senate. The official seal of the Senate is in the custody of, and its use is prescribed by, the Secretary. In the absence of the Vice President, and pending the election of a President pro tempore, the Secretary performs the duties of the Chair.

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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

The presiding officer of the House, a member of that body, is elected every two years. The many powers of this office include appointment of committees, their members and assignment of bills to committee.

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STATUTE

The written permanent [law](#) formally enacted by the General Assembly in Delaware for State law and the US Congress for Federal law.

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STRICKEN

A bill is considered stricken when it is withdrawn from consideration by the primary sponsor.

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TITLE

The introduction of a bill that summarizes and lists the subject matter of the [bill](#) as well as [statutes](#) affected by it.

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VETO

In Delaware - The Governor's disapproval of a bill passed by the General Assembly. Unless overridden by a three-fifths vote of the total membership of each house, a veto prevents a bill from becoming law.

US Government - The constitutional procedure by which the President refuses to approve a bill or joint resolution, and thus prevents its enactment into law. There are three kinds of veto that can occur with a Congressional bill:

- A **regular veto** occurs when the President returns the legislation to the originating House without approval. It can be overridden only by a two-thirds vote in each House.
- A **pocket veto** occurs after Congress has adjourned and is unable to override the President's action.
- The President may also choose to disapprove only particular items of a bill without having to disapprove the entire bill, which is called a **line-item veto**.

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The above definitions were taken in part from the US Congressional web site (www.thomas.gov) and the Delaware General Assembly web site (<http://www.legis.delaware.gov>).

If there is a legislative term that you would like to see added to this page, please contact Christine Pauley at the Delaware Healthcare Association at christinep@deha.org.