

What a Long Strange Trip It's Been... **Getting Legislation Passed in PA**

The following is a summary of a program presented by Christina Sappey on Jan. 29, 2018. At that time, she was Chief of Staff for PA 156th District Representative Carolyn Comitta. This document does not describe every aspect of the process. For more details visit: <http://www.pacapitol.com/Resources/PDF/Making-Law-In-PA.pdf>

You can track what's happening with a bill by visiting the website:

<http://www.legis.state.pa.us/> Find the "Legislation Quick Search" (upper right corner.) Enter the bill number, e.g., HB 1400. You can also identify your legislators that site. Look in the far left column, "Find My Legislator."

When you see all of the steps a bill goes through, you can understand why we often issue more than one "Call to Action" on the same bill. Each step may require sending encouragement to the legislators involved in that stage of the process (House, Senate, Committee).

The regulation of key aspects of gun purchase and carry within Pennsylvania (where you can take your gun; whether you can carry it hidden or in the open) are established by state law. Therefore, Gun Sense Chester County monitors the legislature for gun-related bills.

While passing a bill is a long, complicated process, if we want to reduce gun violence and influence how guns are present in our society, it's important we understand it. So here we go!

1. A Bill Is Born

A bill may be drafted by:

- Legislators and/or their staff
- The governor
- Interest groups and/or any interested citizen



Several interest groups working together on a bill can be useful. If the groups cover a broad geographic area and have many members, it may attract the support of more legislators.

Drafting a bill is hard work. It takes time to identify and address the different effects the bill may have if passed.

For gun related bills, groups that may be involved in discussions about a bill include:

- Law enforcement
- The District Attorney's Association
- Victim's Advocacy groups
- The Education Community (e.g. for "guns in schools")
- Gun Enthusiast and Gun Violence Prevention Groups

Each "**legislative session**" is two years. Depending on when the bill is introduced, there may be up to 24 months for it to gain passage. The current legislative session will end Fall 2020.

Thousands of bills are introduced each legislative session. A few hundred pass and are signed into law. If a bill has not passed in one session, it may be reintroduced in the next.



2. The Legislative Environment

The “majority” party, the party with the most candidates elected to either the PA House or Senate, has the most the influence on which bills are introduced and are actively considered. Currently, the Republican Party is in the majority in the PA House and Senate.

To be introduced, the bill needs a “**prime sponsor**.” That’s a Representative or Senator who is willing to put his or her name on the bill and work to advance it.

It’s helpful to have a prime sponsor from the majority party. It’s also helpful to have as many “**co-sponsors**” as possible. (These are additional legislators who sign on in support.)

Legislative leaders sometimes look at the number of co-sponsors on a bill as a way to determine how likely the bill is to pass if it’s brought to a vote.



3. Going to Committee

Once a bill is introduced, it’s assigned a bill number (e.g., House: HB 1400; Senate: SB 209) and a committee. Gun related bills are usually assigned to the Judiciary Committee.

Each committee has co-chairs – the Majority Chair and Minority Chair. The Majority Chairperson represents the party “in the majority” (e.g. currently a Republican.)

The Majority Chairperson decides whether to:

- Hold hearings on the bill
- Advance the bill to the “floor” for a vote of all members
- “Table” the bill (in which case nothing will happen)



4. Initial Triumph or Tragedy

The leaders of the majority **caucus** (each caucus is made up of the elected officials in that party) decide if a bill will advance. Caucus leaders are the House Majority Leader and Senate President.

If the bill is being moved forward, it’s scheduled to go to the “floor” of the House (or Senate). The bill is considered on three separate days. The first day of consideration alerts members to learn about the bill. On the second day of consideration, amendments may be filed. On the third day of consideration, voting on amendments and the main bill takes place.



5. Rinse, Repeat

If a bill passes one chamber, it repeats a similar process in the other chamber. If similar bills have passed in each chamber, a Conference Committee will work out any differences.

6. Visiting the Big Guy

If the bill passes both chambers, it is sent to the Governor for a signature (or veto.) If the governor signs it, the bill passes into law. If the governor issues a veto, the bill goes back to the legislature. A two-thirds “yea” vote is required in each chamber for a veto override. If the bill passes, it’s assigned an “Act” number as it becomes law.

