

# How to Write a Bill

One of the most important responsibilities of a member of Congress is writing legislation. Legislation is how Congress actually makes laws. Here is information on how to write your legislation, as well as a template you can use.

The first part of the bill is the **header information**. This information doesn't make law, but it is extremely important. Most of this is standard language. You will only need to fill in two blanks, **your name and the title of your bill**. The rest of the blanks will be filled in by the Presiding Officer or Clerk when you introduce your bill.

You will need to give your bill a **title**. The full title of the bill that goes here is usually a long title that simply explains what the bill will do. In the bill itself, you will often put a short title which is a simpler and easier way to refer to the bill. For example, Sen. John Cornyn has introduced a bill about prison reform. The full title of the bill is "to reduce recidivism and increase public safety, and for other purposes." The short title is the "CORRECTIONS Act: (which stands for the Corrections Oversight, Recidivism Reduction, and Eliminating Costs for Taxpayers In Our National System act of 2015").

Now that the header information is done, you are ready to write your bill. A bill will always start with the enactment clause "Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled." You now start a section 1 and begin writing your actual legislation. As we go through this template and explain how to write a bill, I want to note that you may not need to use all the sections or you may need more sections. If you need to remove or add a section, you can do that and then number the rest of the sections accordingly. There is no maximum to how many sections a bill may have. Also, this is a simple version of a bill. Some bills may be more complex, but this simple version should be all you will need. Most bills will have

The first section is normally the **short title**. As I explained above, the short title is a simple, easy to remember title that you can use to refer to the bill.

The next section is the **explanation of terminology (or "Definitions")**. Some terms in your bill may need to be defined. If you want to ensure that your bill is interpreted to mean what you want it to mean, you will want to define terms that could be defined or interpreted multiple different ways. This section is to make your bill clear and understandable. However, you may not need to define any terms. Each term that you are defining will be its own subsection.

Section 3 is the actual **lawmaking part of the bill**. This is where you say what the bill is going to do. This may take multiple sections. A bill should be written so that each individual thing the bill is doing will be its own section.

You may also need a section on **how the bill will be funded**. If your bill requires money, you will want to state how much money will be spent and from where the money will come. (Please note, this is a difference at iGovern from how it works in Congress. In Congress, rarely will a bill

authorizing an action also appropriate the funds. This is normally a two-step process, but we combine them due to time constraints).

The **penalties for breaking the law** will be another section. Will there be penalties? If there are, what will they be? Prison time? Fines? Some other penalty?

Finally, last section is the **effective date**. This is when the bill will take effect if it becomes a law. It may be a certain amount of time (90 days, 180 days, 3 years, etc.) or a specific date (January 1, 2020). If it is a certain amount of time, the wording will be “This bill will take effect 90 days after being signed by the President or its otherwise becoming law.” You will want to include the “or its otherwise becoming law” because a bill can become a law without the signature of the president.

When you write your bill, you can use the template in the next page. The bill template has line numbers. This is used for amending the bill and finding specific parts (it is much easier to refer to “page 2, line 5” than to say “in the middle of that first paragraph on page 2”). Please save your bill as a .doc or .docx and email it to Glenn Bertsch at [glenn@hsllda.org](mailto:glenn@hsllda.org). Also, if you have any questions when writing your bill, please feel free to contact Glenn.

114TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

**H.R. \_\_\_\_\_**

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Full title of your bill goes here)

In the House of Representatives

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Your name here) introduced the following bill; which was  
read twice and referred to the Committee on

\_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**A BILL**

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Repeat the full title of your bill here)

1 Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America  
2 in Congress assembled.

3 **SEC. 1.**

4 *Short Title: Your bill will have an official title, but this is where you put the title you*  
5 *actually want your bill to be called (i.e. JOBS Act, PATRIOT Act, etc.)*

6 **SEC. 2.**

7 *(a) Explanation of terminology- Which terms need to be defined in order to understand*  
8 *the bill?*

9 *(b) Not all terms will need to be defined. In fact, you may not need to define any terms.*

10 **SEC. 3.**

11 *What is the act going to do? Who is going to be involved / impacted / affected by the act?*

12 **SEC. 4.**

13 *How is the act going to be funded? Who is going to enforce / administer this act? (Which*  
14 *government agency will oversee the bill and its duties?).*

15 **SEC. 5.**

16 *Penalties (if any) for non-compliance (not following the rules) of the act*

17 **SEC. 6.**

18 *Enactment Date: When will the law go into effect?*