

iLabLiberia



HOW OUR LAWS ARE MADE



UNDERSTANDING THE
LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

FOREWARD

We are pleased to present this manual on Liberia's legislative process developed in partnership with the National Democratic Institute (NDI). Members of the Liberian Legislature of the Republic of Liberia are committed to improving the quality and effectiveness of the legislative process.

As representatives of the Liberian people, legislators are the eyes and ears of their constituents; they debate and adopt legislation to benefit all Liberians, and exercise oversight over the executive branch of government. In taking the oath of office, legislators commit themselves to uphold and defend the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Liberia and to conduct their responsibilities faithfully.

This manual is intended to provide an overview of the steps a bill goes through on its way to becoming law. Every citizen should be well informed about the legislative process to increase understanding of news reports and discussions around the work of the legislature and to increase the meaningful input of citizens in democratic government.

An open, transparent and inclusive legislative process is one of the cornerstones of any democracy. In Liberia, the legislative process has been designed to give all sides an opportunity to be heard and share their views. The fact that a bill cannot become law without the passage of both the Senate and the House of Representatives and approval of the President is also a component of the inclusive approach to lawmaking in Liberia.

This manual was designed as part of the modernization process of the legislature. Our special thanks to the President of the Senate, President pro-tempore and members of the Senate, and the Speaker and members of the House of Representatives for their support and leadership in this process.

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Speaker of the
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INTRODUCTION

In Liberia there are three branches of government: the Legislature, Executive, and Judiciary. The Legislative branch is responsible for making laws, exercise oversight and representing the Liberian people.

The Executive branch enforces and carries out laws after they have been passed. The Executive branch is made up of the Presidency, ministries and agencies.

The Judicial branch is composed of courts including the Supreme Court and other subordinate courts. The Judicial branch of government interprets the law.

Together these three branches of government create a system of "checks and balances" that ensures that no one branch of government is too powerful, as illustrated on page 12.

THE LIBERIAN LEGISLATURE

The Liberian Legislature meets at the Capitol Building in Monrovia. The legislature is made up of two houses: the Senate and the House of Representatives. There is a total of 103 members.

The Senate: The Senate has 30 members, two Senators from each county regardless of its size. The Vice President of Liberia serves as the President of the Senate. The Senate also elects a President pro tempore who presides over the Senate in the absence of the President of the Senate and serves as the chief administrator.

The House of Representatives: The House of Representatives is composed of 73 members. The membership of the House is based on the population of the registered voters found in each county. The Speaker of the House is elected by the members of the House to preside over the chamber.

The legislature has three main functions: representing representatives and constituents,



HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

HOUSE OF ORIGIN

The bill is introduced in either the House of Representatives or Senate (called the house of origin) and given a first reading.

The bill is assigned to a committee. The members will debate the issues, seek comments from experts and citizens; and possibly make changes. The committee will submit a report to the plenary.

The bill is given a second reading by the plenary. The members may decide to send the bill back to the committee or make amendments.

When the legislators are satisfied that there has been sufficient debate, the bill as amended is given a third reading in the plenary and members are called on to vote in favor of or against it.

SECOND HOUSE

The bill is received from the first house. It is introduced in the second house and given a first reading.

The bill is assigned to a committee. The members will debate the issues, seek comments from experts and citizens; and possibly make changes. The committee will submit a report to the plenary.

The bill is given a second reading by the plenary. The members may decide to send the bill back to the committee or make amendments.

When the legislators are satisfied that there has been sufficient debate, the bill as amended is given a third reading in the plenary and members are called on to vote in favor of or against it.

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

A conference committee is made up of members from both houses who are responsible for negotiating a compromised version of the bill.

The compromised version of the bill is sent to both houses for approval.

After the compromised bill has passed both houses, it is delivered to the President for approval.

PRESIDENT

The President has a choice to make.

If s/he approves the bill s/he can choose to sign it.

If s/he does not approve the bill, s/he can veto it.

The legislature may override this action with a vote of 2/3 of the membership in each house to approve the bill.