



Information Sheet No.6: How A Bill Becomes Law

Laws, Bills, Acts and Statutes

A bill is a proposed law. When a bill passes the Legislative Assembly and receives Assent from the Commissioner it becomes part of the law of Yukon. Once a bill becomes a law it is also called an Act or Statute. Before a bill becomes law it must pass through five stages: Introduction and First Reading, Second Reading, Committee, Third Reading and Assent.

Introduction and First Reading

This takes place during the Daily Routine when the Speaker calls for 'Introduction of Bills.' All other stages of a bill take place during Orders of the Day. A Minister who has a bill to place before the Assembly will rise at this time and say, "Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill Number __, entitled (name of the bill) be now introduced and read a first time." The procedure is the same for a private member's bill, except that it is only introduced by name, as the bill number will be assigned later by the Clerk. There is no debate on the bill at this point. Once a bill passes First Reading it is put on the *Order Paper* and a motion for Second Reading can be moved at a later date.

Second Reading

At second reading the House debates the bill in principle. Once a Government Bill is on the *Order Paper* the government does not have to give notice to bring it forward for debate. Private members have to give one day's notice for debate on a Private Member's Bill. When a bill is called for debate the bill's sponsor will rise and say, "Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill Number __, entitled (bill name) be now read a second time."

The member who introduced the bill (the sponsor) can now speak about it for an unlimited amount of time. When the sponsor is done speaking another member (one from the other side of the Assembly) will also have unlimited time to speak. All other members will have 20 minutes to speak if they wish to. Once all members who wish to speak have spoken the sponsor has 20 minutes to speak again and close debate.¹

Once debate is closed the Speaker will ask members if they are 'prepared for the question' (ready to vote). If members indicate that they are prepared for the question the Speaker will ask if they agree with the motion for second reading. By listening to the voice vote the Speaker will determine if the 'yeas' or 'nays' are in the majority and whether the bill has passed second reading or not. If two members rise in their places and call for a 'division' the Speaker will ring the bells to let members inside the Assembly and outside know that a formal vote will be conducted. Once the bells have stopped ringing the Speaker will ask the Clerk to call out the name of each member present, and each member will rise in their turn and state whether they "agree" or "disagree" with the motion for second reading. Once all members present have been

¹ This time limit is raised to 40 minutes for Second Reading of a main appropriation bill.

given the chance to vote the Clerk will announce the results and the Speaker will declare whether the motion for second reading has carried or not.

Committee Stage

Standing Order 57(4) says, “Unless otherwise ordered by the Assembly, when a Government Bill or a Private Member’s Bill is read the second time, it stands ordered for consideration by Committee of the Whole.” It is during this stage that a bill is examined clause by clause. In addition, a budget bill is examined department by department. Though amendments (changes) can be proposed at this stage they must be consistent with the principle of the bill because the principle of the bill was approved at second reading. During the committee stage members can speak as often as they wish, for a maximum of 20 minutes each time.

Third Reading

The third reading stage allows the Assembly to consider the bill in its final form, subject to whatever amendments took place during the committee stage. The bill’s sponsor begins third reading by rising and saying, “Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill Number ___, entitled (bill name), be now read a third time and do pass.” Members can then debate and vote on the bill in the same way as at second reading. Bills will often pass third reading without any debate, if there were no amendments at the committee stage.

If the Assembly believes a bill requires amendment after it is passes through the committee stage, it may ‘recommit’ the bill to Committee of the Whole. This can happen when the bill is called for third reading, or during third reading. This rarely happens in the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

Assent

If a bill receives third reading and passes it is presented to the Commissioner for Assent. The Assent ceremony usually takes place in the Assembly Chamber and typically happens at the end of the Spring or Fall Sitting, when all the bills that have passed third reading are presented to the Commissioner at once.

The Assent ceremony begins when the Commissioner enters the Chamber and takes the Speaker’s chair. The Speaker, standing to the Commissioner’s right, will, on behalf of the Assembly, ask the Commissioner to grant Assent to the bills that have passed the House. The Clerk of the Assembly will then read out the names of the bills. The Commissioner will then “assent to the bills as enumerated by the Clerk.” Those bills are now laws.

Most laws come into effect as soon as they receive Assent. However, some bills will specify that the whole bill, or parts of it, will come into force on a future specified date, a retroactive specified date, or a future, unspecified date of proclamation by the Commissioner in Executive Council (the cabinet).

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