

The Senate President and House Speaker each appoint a Majority Leader with whom they consult on the selection of a Majority Whip and Deputy Majority Leader. In both House and Senate, the political party having fewer seats chooses a Minority Leader and a Minority Whip.

Duties and prerogatives of the President and Speaker enable them to influence the legislative process significantly. The President and the Speaker appoint the members of standing committees, joint committees, conference committees, and select committees. They designate the chairperson and vice-chairperson of all committees, except for the Joint Committee on Investigation whose members elect their own officers. The President and Speaker preside over the daily sessions of their respective chambers, maintaining decorum and deciding points of order. As legislation is introduced, they assign it to a standing committee for consideration and a public hearing.

Since 1971, the General Assembly has convened annually on the second Wednesday in January. Normally, sessions do not exceed ninety consecutive days. The General Assembly may extend its sessions an additional thirty days by resolution passed by three-fifths vote of the membership in each house. The Governor is the only person with the power to call the legislature into special session and in fact must do so on petition of a majority of the elected membership of each house (Const., Art. II, sec. 16; Art. III, sec. 14). No single special session, however, may last longer than thirty days. Special sessions were constitutionally provided for at a time when the General Assembly convened every two years instead of annually, but as recently as 1985, the Governor called the General Assembly into special session twice. The Governor cannot adjourn the General Assembly, but before any proposed adjournment *sine die*, the General Assembly must ask if the Governor wishes to make any further communications to either house (Senate Rule 111; House Rule 111). Both houses must agree to adjourn.

The purpose of the General Assembly is to pass laws necessary for the welfare of the State. The legislature may establish executive departments as needed for the efficient operation of State government and may create special taxing districts or areas within the State to administer a special function or functions. In accordance with the Constitutions of Maryland and of the United States, the General Assembly may levy taxes. It may propose State Constitutional amendments, which must be passed by three-fifths of the total membership of each house and submitted to the voters for ratification at the next general election after passage. Legislative authority is limited only by the State Constitution, the U.S. Constitution, and judicial decisions.

The General Assembly spends considerable time dealing with local issues, ordinances, and expenditures. The Constitution adopted in 1867 kept the power to pass public local laws vested in the General Assembly. In essence, this gave control of county government to county delegations in the General Assembly. Since 1948, however, twelve counties and Baltimore City have opted for some form of home rule, allowing the General Assembly a more statewide focus. The Municipal Home Rule Amendment of 1954 virtually prohibits the General Assembly from passing local legislation for incorporated cities and towns, although the Assembly retains its power to pass a general statewide law that affects them (Const., Art. XI-E). Power to regulate elections and to license and regulate the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages, however, is reserved to the General Assembly, and home rule counties are limited to exercising the powers enumerated in the Express Powers Act (Code 1957, Art. 25A, sec. 5).

Local bills passed by the General Assembly may include a referendum provision that requires submission of the bill to voter approval. With the exception of a proposed amendment to the Constitution, a statewide bill may not be submitted by the General Assembly to referendum, because such an action has been construed by the courts to constitute a delegation of the legislature's lawmaking powers. Most statewide bills (except appropriations) and any local bill that concerns a county or Baltimore City, however, may be petitioned to a referendum by the voters. No bill subject to referendum, except an emergency bill, is enforceable until approved by a majority of the voters at the next election. An emergency bill subject to referendum goes into effect upon passage and remains effective for thirty days following its rejection by the voters (Const., Art. XVI).

The House of Delegates has sole power to impeach officers and judges of the State. A majority of all members of the House must approve any bill of impeachment. The Senate tries all impeachment cases, and two-thirds of the total number of Senators must concur in reaching a verdict of guilty (Const., Art. III, sec. 26).