

through the legislative process within the 90-day session. Therefore, legislators often try to introduce their bills as early as possible. A bill filed with the Secretary of the Senate or the Chief Clerk of the House prior to the first day of a regular session is called a prefiled bill. Such a bill is introduced (i.e., read across the floor) and assigned to a standing committee on the opening day of a session, thus obtaining a head-start advantage. In 1994, some 179 Senate bills and 179 House bills were prefiled.

BUDGET BILL

The Constitution provides for an annual budget bill. Each year, the Governor presents a bill to the General Assembly containing the budget for State government for the next fiscal year. (In Maryland, the fiscal year begins July 1 and ends June 30.) The General Assembly may reduce the Governor's budget proposals, but it may not increase them. The budget, however, whether it is supplemented or amended, must be balanced; total estimated revenues always must be equal to or exceed total appropriations (Const., Art. III, sec. 52(5a)).

If the General Assembly has not acted upon the budget bill seven days before the expiration of a regular session, the Governor by proclamation may extend the session for action to be taken on the bill. After both houses pass the budget bill, it becomes law without further action (Const., Art. III, sec. 52). The Governor may not veto the budget bill.

JOINT RESOLUTIONS

In addition to bills, legislators introduce joint resolutions. Substantive in nature, joint resolutions express the will, opinion, or public policy of the General Assembly (Senate Rule 25; House Rule 25). They are subject to the same legislative process as are bills, must be passed by both houses, but after passage are not codified in the *Annotated Code*. Joint resolutions that pass both houses are numbered and printed in the session laws for that year. The Governor does not veto joint resolutions and may or may not sign them.

Certain issues are required by law or the Constitution to be introduced in the form of a joint resolution and such joint resolutions have the force and effect of law. Examples include salary recommendations from the General Assembly Compensation Commission, the Governor's Salary Commission, and the Judicial Compensation Commission; reapportionment plans for General Assembly membership required after every decennial census; and amendments to the U.S. Constitution submitted for ratification.

LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

After the Department of Legislative Reference drafts legislation in the form of a bill or a joint resolution, the sponsor files it ("drops it into the hopper") with the Secretary of the Senate or the

Chief Clerk of the House of Delegates. The bill or resolution is numbered, stamped for approval and codification by the Department of Legislative Reference, and printed for first reading (Senate Rule 26; House Rule 26). Senate legislation appears on white paper and House legislation on blue paper.

The Constitution of Maryland requires that before any bill becomes law, it must be read on three different days in each house, for a total of six readings. A bill may not be read for the third time in its house of origin until it has been reprinted. The Constitution also specifies that a bill must be passed in each house by a majority vote of the total membership, and the final vote on third reading in each house must be recorded.

INTRODUCTION OF BILL (1st READING OF BILL)

A bill may be introduced throughout the ninety days of a session, but the later a bill is introduced, the more difficult its passage becomes. Any Senate bill introduced after the 24th calendar day of a session must be referred to the Senate Rules Committee, cannot be required to be returned to the floor except by a two-thirds vote of the membership, and may not be petitioned from the Rules Committee (Senate Rule 32). A House bill introduced after the 45th calendar day must be referred to the House Rules and Executive Nominations Committee, requires a two-thirds vote to be returned to the floor, and cannot be petitioned from the Rules and Executive Nominations Committee (House Rule 32). For a bill to be introduced during the last 35 days of a session, the rules must be suspended by a two-thirds vote (Const., Art. III, sec. 27). Except for the annual budget bill and bills creating or amending State debts, a House bill that crosses over to the Senate after the 76th day of session is subject to the same restrictions as is a bill introduced after the 24th day.

COMMITTEES

Standing Committees. After introduction, the bill is assigned to the appropriate committee for review. The committee system is a vital part of the legislative process. Rules of each house require that every bill or joint resolution, with one exception, be referred to a standing committee after first reading (Senate Rule 33; House Rule 33). Standing committees are defined as those committees set forth in the Rules of the Senate or the Rules of the House of Delegates (Code State Government Article, sec. 2-101(f)). Their primary function is to consider all legislation referred to them by the Senate President or House Speaker. To review proposed legislation, the Senate has four standing committees and the House has six (Senate Rule 18; House Rule 18).

At the beginning of each session, the Senate President and House Speaker name chairs, vice-