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**ORIGIN & FUNCTIONS**


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In Maryland, the House of Delegates originated as the Lower House of the General Assembly in 1650, when the legislature became a bicameral body (Chapter 1, Acts of 1650). To the Lower House, freemen in each hundred elected burgesses as their representatives. From 1654, the county replaced the hundred as the local area represented.

During the first century of its existence, the Lower House waged battle with the Upper House for political influence in the colony. The Upper House consisted of the governor and his council, all personally appointed by Lord Baltimore, and thus dedicated to protect his interests in Maryland. Conversely, the Lower House pushed for change in the colony, claiming to be the true elected representatives of the people. In this context, the Lower House continually fought for more power by asserting exclusive rights in certain legislative areas, such as levying taxes and originating money bills. Disputing those claims, the Upper House sought to block such actions by the Lower House.

The governor also sought control of the Lower House in the late seventeenth century. Then, legislators had to be summoned by personal writs of the governor to attend the General Assembly. Despite the fact that each county was entitled to elect four delegates, the governor selected only two of these to sit in the Lower House. This enabled the governor to control the Lower House's membership.

In 1689, the transfer of Maryland from a proprietary to a royal colony temporarily quieted the disputes between the Lower House and the governor and council. Appointed by the crown, the royal governors allowed the Lower House substantial latitude with its legislative agenda. This was evident in the first assembly convened under crown rule.

The first royal assembly of 1692 was both innovative and prolific in their legislative duties, passing 85 acts in a single session. The Lower House wasted no time eliminating the governor's influence over the election of delegates. Now, elected delegates could attend the session without the need for a special writ from the governor (Chapter 76, Acts of 1692). At the same time, standing or continuing committees were established in the Lower House in 1692. These committees dealt with elections, legislation, grievances, and accounts. They eliminated the Lower House's reliance on ad hoc committees and created the first modern legislature in Maryland. During this period, the Lower House became known as the House of Delegates.

When the colony was returned to proprietary control in 1715, Charles Calvert, Fifth Lord Baltimore, encountered a government which bore little resemblance to the one seized from his grandfather twenty-five years earlier. The House of Delegates was not willing to relinquish the political independence it had gained while under royal control. In the restored proprietary government, the House of Delegates played a stronger role in relations with Lord Baltimore, the governor, and the Upper House.

A major legislative accomplishment of this period was the revision and publication of the laws of the colony (Chapter 25, Acts of 1715). Three years later, the House of Delegates compiled all of the laws passed since 1692 and issued them in a single volume.

The Constitution of 1776 established the House of Delegates (Const. 1776, secs. 1-6). Initially, representation was based on geography as the voters of each county elected four delegates, and two each were elected from Annapolis and Baltimore. These delegates served one-year terms, not increased to two years until 1845, nor to the present four years until 1922 (Chapter 269, Acts of 1845; Chapter 227, Acts of 1922). Political unrest in the 1830s, however, forced constitutional reform and reapportionment based loosely on population. Beginning with the 1838 elections, each county elected at least three and up to six delegates depending on its population. Baltimore City elected the same number of delegates as did the most populous county, but after 1840, Annapolis was considered part of Anne Arundel County. Counties retained their power as political units. Reapportionment was required after every federal census in an attempt to achieve equal representation.

The current pattern for distribution of seats in the House of Delegates began with the legislative apportionment plan of 1972 and has been revised every ten years thereafter. A Constitutional amendment, the plan created 47 legislative districts, many of which cross county boundaries to delineate districts relatively equal in population. Each legislative district sends three delegates for a total of 141 members of the House. Some of the larger districts are divided into delegate subdistricts to provide local representation to areas not large enough to constitute an entire legislative district.

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**HOUSE OF DELEGATES  
STANDING COMMITTEES**


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Following the practice of the English House of Commons, the Lower House of Maryland's General Assembly began to use standing committees in the seventeenth century. Though membership

would change, the functions of these standing committees continued from year to year. In 1692, the Lower House (predecessor of today's House of Delegates) formed four standing committees. These first committees concerned Accounts; Grievances; Elections and Privileges; and Laws. They were responsible for considering all proposed