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The lawmaking powers of the State are vested in the General Assembly, which consists of two separate branches, the Senate and the House of Delegates (Const., Art. III, sec. 1). The General Assembly has 188 members, with 47 Senators and 141 Delegates. One Senator and three Delegates are elected from each of the 47 legislative districts. After every decennial census, legislative district boundaries are redrawn to conform to the one person/one vote principle.

Each Senator or Delegate must be a citizen of the State and a resident for at least one year preceding the date of election. A prospective legislator must have resided for the six months prior to the election in the legislative district the candidate seeks to represent. A Senator must be at least twenty-five years of age at the time of election and a Delegate at least twenty-one. Persons elected to or holding a civil or military office under the United States or Maryland Government are not eligible for election to the General Assembly (Const., Art. III, secs. 9, 10, 11). All seats in the General Assembly are up for election every four years. (The next general election will be held November 1990.)

The term of each Senator and Delegate is four years from the second Wednesday of January following the date of election (Const., Art. III, sec. 6). No limit is placed on the number of terms a legislator may serve. If a vacancy occurs in either house through death, resignation, or disqualification, the Governor appoints a replacement whose name is submitted by the State Central Committee of the same political party as the legislator whose seat is to be filled. All persons so appointed serve for the unexpired portion of the term (Const., Art. III, sec. 13).

Each house elects its own officers, judges the qualifications and election of its own members, establishes rules for the conduct of its business, and may punish or expel its own members. Legislators, however, are not liable in civil or criminal actions for words spoken in debate (Const., Art. III, secs. 18, 19). The Senate and the House of Delegates each appoint staff such as desk officers. The Secretary of the Senate and the Chief Clerk of the House are the highest ranking staff members in their respective chambers.

On the first day of a regular legislative session, the Secretary of the Senate calls the roll and conducts the election of a President Pro Tem, who in turn presides over the election of the President of the Senate. The President Pro Tem administers the oath of office to the President and thereafter carries out any duties assigned by the President. In the House of Delegates, the Chief Clerk calls the roll and proceeds with the organization of the House. A Speaker Pro Tem is elected first, who presides over the election of the Speaker of the House and administers the Speaker's oath of office.