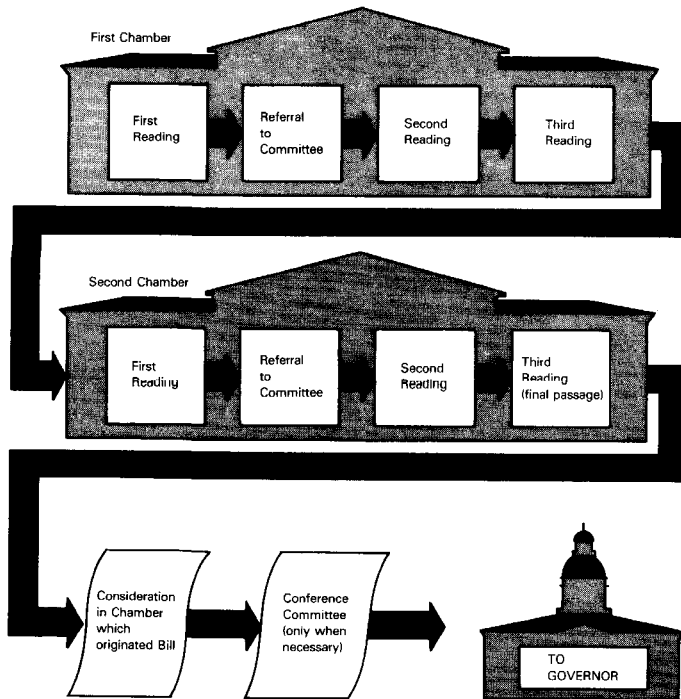


THE PROGRESS OF A BILL



placed on each consent calendar. The consent calendar is a list of bills to be read and voted upon as a group (Const., Art. II, sec. 17; Art. III, secs. 27, 28). This procedure greatly expedites the legislative process. In 1988, the Senate revised its rules to place bills and joint resolutions on consent calendars by category as they are voted out of committee (Senate Rule 55). The House of Delegates still retains a Consent Calendars Committee to determine which bills and joint resolutions may be included on consent calendars (House Rules 18 and 55).

The Constitution also 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. The budget bill, however 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 as necessary 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).

Bills 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 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 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.

The committee system is a vital part of the legislative machinery. 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). Bills having a purely local impact are referred to select committees composed of the local delegation or the local Senators. The fate of most legislative proposals is determined in committee. Committees are required to hold a public hearing on each bill or joint resolution assigned to them. During session, the Department of Legislative Reference publishes