

THREE BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT

The Judicial Branch is one of three co-equal branches of government, along with the Executive Branch, which includes the Governor's office, the Executive Council and state agencies, and the Legislative Branch, which includes the Senate and the House.

The legislature makes the laws, the courts interpret the laws enacted by the legislature, and the Executive Branch, through agencies such as the Attorney General's office, enforces the laws.

Lawmakers can pass laws that will affect the administration of the court system. For example, the Family Division of the court system began as a pilot project initiated by the legislature in two counties. Eventually, the legislature, working with the court system, voted to expand the Family Division statewide to all 10 counties. The legislature also approves the Judicial Branch budget as part of the biennial budget process for all of state government.

How Laws are Made

- A member of the House or Senate files a request for a new law with the Office of Legislative Services which then puts the request into the form of a "bill." The bill is then submitted to the chamber of the legislature in which the sponsor is a member. The House Speaker or Senate President assigns the bill to an appropriate standing committee.
- A public hearing is scheduled on all bills. The committee members then vote on whether to recommend that their legislative chamber pass the bill either in its original form or as amended, refer it back to committee for further study or defeat it.
- The committee recommendation is then sent to the full legislative chamber. If one chamber of the legislature passes a bill as originally drafted, or with amendments, the bill is then referred to the second chamber where the same process is followed: public hearing, committee recommendation, vote by the full chamber.
- If either chamber refers a bill to a study committee or defeats it, the bill goes no further.
- If either chamber disagrees with the language or provisions of a bill, a conference committee composed of members from both chambers is established to resolve the disagreement. If a new version of the bill is agreed upon, another vote is required, in both chambers, before going to the Governor's desk.
- The Governor has five days from the time of the bill's arrival to veto it, sign it into law or let it go into effect without a signature. If the bill is vetoed by the Governor, a two-thirds vote of both the House and Senate is required for an override. If an override vote is successful, the bill becomes law.

Each year, new laws are added by number and title to the "New Hampshire Revised Statutes Annotated," the official digest of New Hampshire law, compiled by the state Office of Legislative Services. The RSAs, as they are commonly known, are also revised every year to reflect new or repealed sections of laws or language changes and other amendments made by the legislature. You can look up a law, by subject, title or number on the state website, www.state.nh.us.

Adapted from A Primer on the Legislative Process. For more information visit www.gencourt.state.nh.us.