



## Legislative Advocacy

### Getting to know the RI General Assembly

#### **History and purpose of General Assembly**

A bill becomes a law through the actions of the General Assembly and the Governor. The General Assembly operates under the authority of the Rhode Island Constitution (see <http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/RiConstitution/>) which is based on the Royal Charter of 1663 and reflects changes approved by voters over the years. Under that authority, the General Assembly enacts state laws that are administered by the executive branch and interpreted by the judiciary.

#### **Membership of General Assembly**

The General Assembly consists of two chambers, a 38 member Senate and a 75 member House of Representatives. The Rhode Island General Assembly is a part-time legislature with many members holding full-time jobs outside of their role as legislator.

For a full list of the 75 House members, visit: <http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/Email/RepEmailListDistrict.asp>

For a full list of the 38 Senate members, visit:  
<http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/Email/SenEmailListDistrict.asp>

To find your legislators, visit the RI Citizens for the Arts action center: <http://bit.ly/9d3Zfw>

#### **Election of members of the General Assembly**

Members of both chambers are elected in even numbered years for two-year terms that begin on the first Tuesday of January following the election. For example, the last elections were in November 2008 for a term that started in January 2009, and will last until December 2010.

#### **Schedule of General Assembly**

According to the Rhode Island Constitution, the legislative session lasts 60 days. The General Assembly meets Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, generally starting in the late afternoon since many legislators hold full-time jobs. The legislative session begins the first Tuesday of January and ends the first of July of the same year.

### **Leadership of General Assembly**

The presiding officer of the House is the Speaker. The presiding officer of the Senate is the President of the Senate. The legislative process starts when a Senator or Representative introduces a bill in his or her respective chamber. Most bills are assigned to a permanent committee of the originating chamber for review. The subject matter of the legislation usually determines what committee will initially consider the bill.

### **Committees in General Assembly**

Each committee is headed by a chairman, a vice chairman, a secretary, a clerk, and a legal counsel. The committee makes recommendations and returns the bill to the originating chamber where it will be voted on. Once the bill has been approved, it is transferred to the other chamber to undergo a similar process of review and approval.

For a list of committees and their membership, visit:

<http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/CommitteeMembers/>

To see committee calendars, visit: <http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/QuickCalendar/>

### **Lawmaking in the General Assembly**

Both chambers have to approve a bill, before it can become law. It is then submitted to the Governor, who may sign the bill into law or allow it to become effective without his signature. If the Governor disapproves of a bill, he may veto it and return it to the branch of origin. If 60% of the members present and voting approve the bill in both chambers, it becomes a law.

**For more on how a bill becomes a law in Rhode Island, visit:**

<http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/genmenu/GenMisc/genbilaw.html>