

**NAVIGATING THE LEGISLATURE'S WEB SITE**  
**For the LWVDE Voter**  
**How to Track Legislation on the Web**  
**(Written by John Sykes, past Advocacy Committee Chair, based on the Great Works of Lisa Pertzoff)**

## INTRODUCTION

This article is meant to provide a “How To” explanation of the process of following the bills and resolutions of our Delaware General Assembly, simply referred to as the Legislature, using the Internet. Its purpose is to enable you to locate the appropriate pages on the Web; to find specific pieces of legislation both past and present, to know what specifically to watch for; and to have an idea of how the process works in such a way that you can feel more confident about how to participate in the process as lobbyists representing the LWV, or as plain, individual citizens.



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## BASIC INTERNET ACCESS

Almost all of the Internet sites that we use in tracking legislation are located within the Delaware government world, although there are a few others that are helpful. Naturally, you will use your Internet browser to connect to the Internet. As most browsers on most computers will work for these sites, you should have few problems if you use Internet Explorer, Safari, Chrome or Firefox. As you find web sites that are important and that you frequently visit, it is suggested that you make a bookmark or favorite for that site with your browser. As all browsers have the capability of created folders within their bookmarks, you may wish to create a folder for Legislation and place the bookmarks into this folder to make them easier to find.

## THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FROM THE INTERNET

We are fortunate that our Legislature has provided a great deal of information online. Their home web location is: <http://legis.delaware.gov/>. From this location, you may enter many of the functions of our Legislature, including: Bill Tracking, House and Senate information, Meeting Schedules, and a Virtual Tour of Legislative Hall. Please note that in the center of this home page, there are links that are very helpful. Under the headings of “Senate” and “House”, one can find the pages of their own senators and representatives, link to the list of committees and their members, the current agendas of committee hearings, and link to the “Ready List” of each house, where one can find what bills and resolutions are now out of committee and ready for debate in chambers.

Also on the main site, there is a very informative link called “Session Activity Report”, which shows day-by-day legislative activities. These include lists of 1) Legislation Signed by the Governor, 2) New Legislation Introduced, 3) Legislation Passed by the Senate”, 4) Legislation Passed by the House or Representatives, 5) House Committee Assignments, and 5) Legislation Released from Committees.

For those that are new to Delaware’s legislative process, there is an explanation later in this article that outlines the process. Also, the General Assembly has created a web site that explains how a bill becomes a law. This is yet another site worth spending some time if one wishes to learn the process. It is especially important for those who might want to get involved in any particular bill or in becoming an advocate. Truly, one is only as effective as their understanding on how things work in this branch of government. This site shows graphically the roadmap from start to finish, and also provides a good tutorial through links on the left side of the home page, which is located at: [http://legis.delaware.gov/legislature.nsf/Lookup/Bill\\_Process?open&nav=leginfo](http://legis.delaware.gov/legislature.nsf/Lookup/Bill_Process?open&nav=leginfo).

Finally on this page, there is a very useful section called, **What is Happening Today?** If the House is in session, you may be able to listen live to the proceedings. It would be worth your time to just explore or surf these sites to get a feel for what is available.

## TRACKING BILLS OR RESOLUTIONS

If you know the number of a bill or resolution or the topic that it addresses, finding it is simple. From the GA home page <http://legis.delaware.gov/>, find the area called “Bill Search” in the lower left corner of this page. You will need to have the GA Session number, which for now is 146, the type of bill and the bill number. Or, if you have the topic that the bill addresses, type that in the larger box that says Full Text Search. For the full text search, you will need to fill out the Session number. Having done so, clicking the “Go” button will take you to either the specific bill or a set of bills that match your full text search.

Having now gone to the specific bill’s “home page”, you will find a great deal of information, including both Primary and Co-Sponsors, date the bill was introduced, the official Long Title of the bill, a synopsis, the current status, links to both an internet

version of the text of the bill and to the MS Word version, whether the bill has a fiscal note (will cost the state money) and the history of actions taken on the bill. This page is the heart of the information on each bill and resolution in both houses.

(For those who wish to dig into a bill and really understand what it will do, click on one of the "Full Text of Legislation" and you will see the actual bill. However, this will not provide the complete picture. Almost all bills modify existing law, or if creating new law, will reference the Delaware Code, which can be found online at: <http://delcode.delaware.gov/index.shtml>.

So, to find out what a bill will actually do, it is helpful to read the bill and find out what part of the Delaware Code is modified, deleted or changed. For example, in the current Legislative Session, 146, House Bill 32 (HB31) "...aligns when Sussex County's taxes are due and payable with Sussex County's budget year." This is a really simple bill with only one line of "instructions" or change that reads, "Amend §8601(3), **Title 9** of the Delaware Code by deleting the phrase "May 1" as it appears therein and replacing with the phrase "July 1"." In order to fully understand how the new law would read, one would go to the online code, as referenced above", select **Title 9**, then select Chapter **86** and look for section 8601. As the governor signed this bill into law on April 15<sup>th</sup> of this year, the changes to the Delaware Code have already taken effect. Apparently, the governor has a sense of humor in that he signed a tax bill on income tax day.

Most bills are much more complicated than this and will require a lot of cutting and pasting to see the true effect. But, these laws affect all of us in various ways, so they should be reviewed.

For the more advanced computer user, the General Assembly web site has provided a really wonderful way to be notified of status changes of all legislation. This service includes all legislation that is: Introduced, in Committee, Out of Committee, In Lieu, Stricken, House Passed, Senate Passed, and Governor Signed. This is done using an internet standard called Really Simply Syndication or RSS. The web site that has all of these, along with an explanation on how to use them, is located at: <http://www.legis.delaware.gov/legislature.nsf/lookup/RSSFeeds>

**MORE ON THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS:** Before tracking a bill we should look at the generic process whereby most bills wind their way through the legislature. There are a number of different avenues by which bills can be introduced, and you should bear in mind that not only are the rules different for each chamber, they are also subject to change from session to session. Theoretically, once a bill is introduced in either chamber, it is assigned to a committee by that chamber's leader – the Senate President Pro Tem or the Speaker of the House. That committee then has twelve legislative days in which to hold a hearing on the bill. Most of the time, these committee hearings are open to the public. If the bill does *not* get enough votes to be released from the committee (**OOC**, or voted **Out of Committee**), that is the end of it. If it *is* released from committee, it must then go the floor of the appropriate chamber for a vote. Should it be passed in that chamber, it goes to the other chamber (same designation, same number, unlike the US legislature) where the process is repeated. If it passes there, it goes to the Governor for signature. Please note the process can in reality be much more complicated than I have described which is why I began the sentence with "Theoretically." In addition, there are different scenarios for cases in which the Governor does *not* sign the bill.

#### **TIME OUT FOR ACRONYMS**

<b>FN:</b>	Fiscal Note (Costs the state over \$50,000)
<b>GA:</b>	General Assembly
<b>HB:</b>	House Bill
<b>*HCR:</b>	Houses Concurrent Resolution
<b>**HJR:</b>	House Joint Resolution
<b>HR:</b>	House Resolution
<b>SB:</b>	Senate Bill
<b>**SJR:</b>	Senate Joint Resolution
<b>*SCR:</b>	Senate Concurrent Resolution
<b>SR:</b>	Senate Resolution
<b>F:</b>	Favorable
<b>M:</b>	On its Merits
<b>OOC:</b>	Out of Committee (Voted out of, or released, from Committee)
<b>U:</b>	Unfavorable
<b>LOT:</b>	Laid on the Table (Tabled)

\* **Concurrent Resolution:** Employed to address sentiments of both chambers, to deal with matters affecting both chambers, or to create a joint committee.

\*\* **Joint Resolution:** If passed by both chambers, it can become law if signed by the Governor.