

## How a bill becomes law – and what you can do

A bill is a proposed law that must be approved in both the House of Commons and the Senate (the two Chambers of Parliament) and by the Governor General in order to become law. A bill can introduce a new law or change (amend) an existing one and can begin in either the House of Commons or the Senate.

Here is a brief description of the journey a bill takes to become a law, including the “on ramps for action” that citizens can take at strategic points during the bill’s progression into law. Understanding the process can help us take effective action. Parliament has posted a 2-minute video of the process at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=4O8syj77goQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4O8syj77goQ) and a longer explanation at [www.ourcommons.ca/About/Compendium/LegislativeProcess/c\\_g\\_legislativeprocess-e.htm](http://www.ourcommons.ca/About/Compendium/LegislativeProcess/c_g_legislativeprocess-e.htm).

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### *Step 1: First reading*

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The bill is introduced and given a number, without debate, changes or voting. (Bills that start in the House of Commons are noted with a C, bills that start in the Senate are noted with an S.)

A government bill is introduced by a Cabinet minister and has the support of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. A private member’s bill is brought forward by a single MP or Senator. House of Commons government bills are given a number between 2 and 199, private members’ bills are numbered starting at 200. This step is called “first reading.”

#### What you can do:

- Ask a Cabinet Minister, an MP or a Senator to develop legislation in a particular area.
- Check on the status of bills at [www.parl.gc.ca/LegisInfo](http://www.parl.gc.ca/LegisInfo)

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### *Step 2: Second reading*

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At second reading, the general principles of the bill are debated, but not the specific details. At the end of the allocated time, there is a vote on whether to approve the bill in principle.

#### What you can do:

- Phone or write to MPs or Senators to ask them to support or oppose a bill. Your letter or phone call can make a difference. (See: Other Effective Ways to Communicate with an MP.)

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### *Step 3: Committee stage*

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If the bill passes second reading, a committee will study it in depth and may recommend changes. The committee may hold public hearings to hear from witnesses in person or may receive written submissions on the bill. The committee sends the bill back to the House of Commons or Senate Chamber, with or without recommendations for specific changes.

#### *What you can do:*

- A committee will often ask stakeholders and experts to give their opinion and recommend changes to the committee as it studies a bill.

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### *Step 4: Report stage*

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The bill, with any changes made by the committee, is considered by the House of Commons at report stage. Other changes may be proposed and debated at this stage. The Senate only considers a bill at report stage if the committee has recommended changes or recommended that the bill not be studied further.

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### *Step 5: Third reading*

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The bill goes back to the House of Commons or Senate Chamber for a final debate and vote. This is called “third reading.”

#### *What you can do:*

- Phone or write to MPs or Senators to ask them to support or oppose a bill. Your letter or phone call can make a difference.

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### *Step 6: Other chamber*

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If the bill passes third reading, it is sent to the other chamber and goes through the same process of debates, committee review and votes. For example, a bill that begins in the House of Commons then goes to the Senate, and Senate bills then go to the House of Commons.

#### *What you can do:*

- Can communicate support, requests or concerns as the bill goes through the same steps in the other chamber of Parliament.

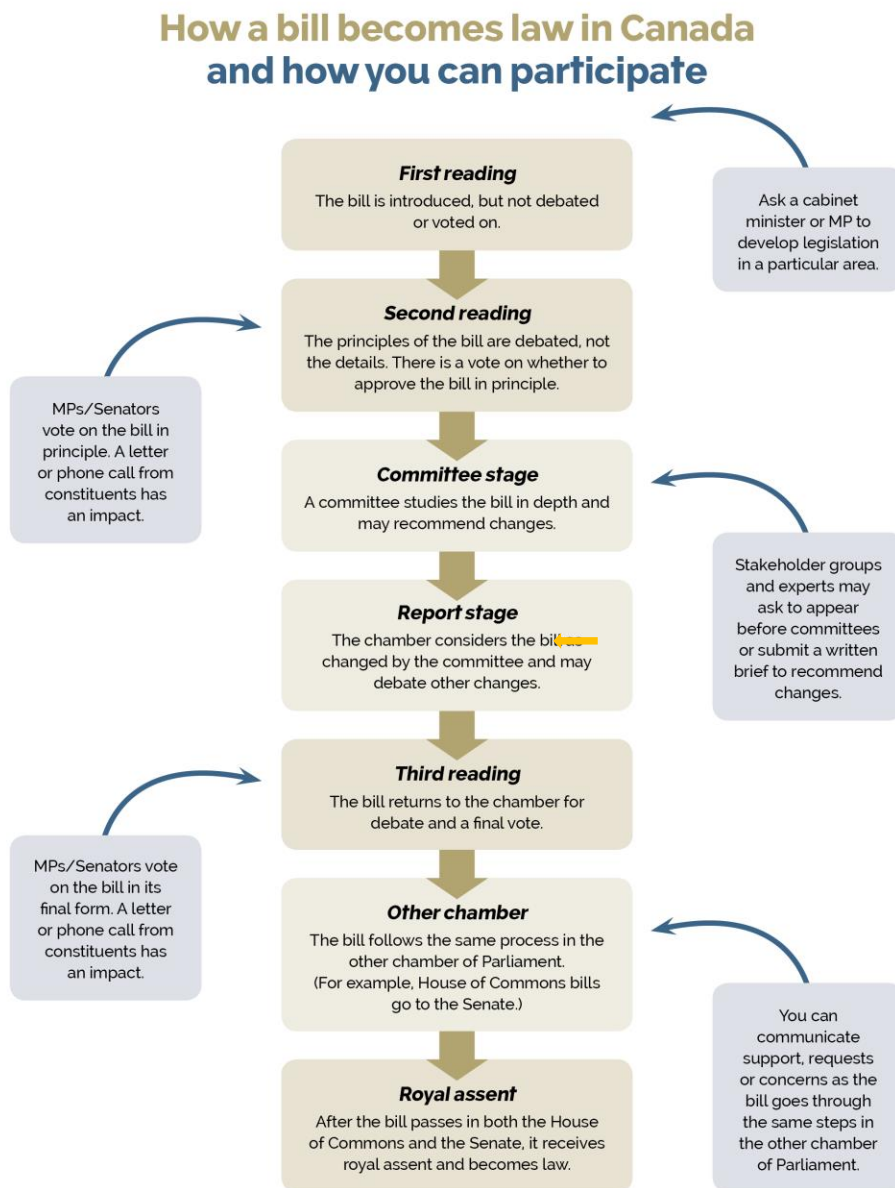
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## Step 7: Royal Assent

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After the bill has been passed in both the House of Commons and the Senate, it receives royal assent by the Governor General and becomes law.

Here's a diagram that sums up the seven steps and how you can participate.



## Where to find out about bills, federal and provincial

Check the status of federal bills at [www.parl.gc.ca/LegisInfo](http://www.parl.gc.ca/LegisInfo).

Find out about bills – and your elected representative’s contact information – on your provincial or territorial legislature’s website.

British Columbia: [www.leg.bc.ca](http://www.leg.bc.ca)

Alberta: [www.assembly.ab.ca](http://www.assembly.ab.ca)

Saskatchewan: [www.legassembly.sk.ca](http://www.legassembly.sk.ca)

Manitoba: [www.gov.mb.ca/legislature](http://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature)

Ontario: [www.ola.org](http://www.ola.org)

Quebec: [www.assnat.qc.ca/en/index.html](http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/index.html)

New Brunswick: [www.gnb.ca/legis](http://www.gnb.ca/legis)

Nova Scotia: [www.nslegislature.ca](http://www.nslegislature.ca)

Prince Edward Island: [www.assembly.pe.ca](http://www.assembly.pe.ca)

Newfoundland: [www.assembly.nl.ca](http://www.assembly.nl.ca)

Yukon: [www.legassembly.gov.yk.ca](http://www.legassembly.gov.yk.ca)

Northwest Territories:

[www.assembly.gov.nt.ca](http://www.assembly.gov.nt.ca)

Nunavut: [www.assembly.nu.ca](http://www.assembly.nu.ca)

## Why I rushed home and finally called my MP

By Karen Stiller, reprinted with permission from [www.FaithToday.ca/Blog](http://www.FaithToday.ca/Blog)

One day recently, I rushed home from work and called my Member of Parliament. It wasn’t nearly as difficult or stressful as I feared. To be honest, I don’t even know why I thought it would be. What was I so worried about?

Sometimes I host EFC webinars, and the one I had just completed was on euthanasia and physician-assisted death in Canada. During the webinar, we talked about what ordinary Canadians could do to stop the runaway train that appeared, at times, to be assisted death in Canada. *Contact your MP*. That was the most immediate and effective thing we could do at that moment. I pledged during the webinar to contact my MP that very afternoon.

Then, all the way home I tried to squirm out of it. I guess I’d gotten lazy. I write about things and speak to others who do things about things. I fume and fret and wring my hands. But I hadn’t actually been doing anything about a lot of things. Until that day.

I looked up the number, called and spoke with a very polite woman who wrote down my every word. She was pleasant. I was pleasant. I told her I was especially worried about the mature minor recommendations and the lack of protection for those struggling with mental health. I told her I would like my MP to fight for the strictest possible version of assisted suicide and euthanasia in Canada. Then, I gave her my name and number in case my MP wants to call back. It was that simple. I will follow it up with a letter. In fact, I’m going to write that letter right now.

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