



LegisBrief

A QUICK LOOK INTO IMPORTANT ISSUES OF THE DAY

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Limiting Bill Introductions

BY BRENDA ERICKSON

Lawmakers' desire to pass or improve state laws, combined with limited time in session, result in a too-many-bills-and-not-enough-time challenge in many statehouses across the country each year. So what do state legislatures do? They experiment with ways to curb the amount of legislation entering into the process. Some chambers use a direct approach. They limit the number of bills that an individual legislator may request or introduce.

Supporters believe introduction limits help reduce the number of bills entering the legislative process and allow more time to process substantive legislation. Others disagree and say these limits restrict members' rights to propose bills and carry out their legislative responsibilities.

State Action

At least 24 of the nation's 99 chambers impose some sort of bill introduction limit. Such limits are not new, however. In several chambers, they've been in place for decades. For example, North Dakota's limits may have been imposed as early as the 1940s. The 1970s brought limits to both legislative chambers in Colorado and Indiana. The Florida House, Nevada Senate, Nevada Assembly and Tennessee Senate imposed limits during the 1980s. Limits started for the Arizona House, California Senate, California Assembly, Louisiana Senate, Louisiana House and Wyoming Senate in the 1990s.

Bill introduction limits are not always static. They may be revised as the legislatures or circumstances change.

For example, Colorado changed its introduction limit in 1984 and again in 1988. A legislative body also may decide that bill introduction limits do not work for it. For example, the Hawaii Senate, Michigan Senate and House, New Jersey Senate and General Assembly, and Washington House tried using them, but subsequently eliminated the practice.

Exceptions or "safety valves" may be created for required legislation or emergency situations. For example:

- Legislative leaders may be able to introduce more bills than other legislators.
- Limits may not apply to certain bills or resolutions, such as appropriation bills or local bills.
- The rule establishing the limit may be suspended.
- A limit may be exceeded with approval by a special committee, such as a Delayed Bills Committee.

Bill introduction limits also may serve another purpose. Some are designed to encourage early bill preparation—that is, members are allowed to pre-file an unlimited number of bills, but a limit kicks in after session convenes.

Chamber rules set the majority of bill introduction limits. In Louisiana, the state constitution establishes the restriction. The Virginia Senate and House establish their limits by joint resolution. Examples of current bill request or introduction limits in the chart on the following page provide a snapshot of the what these limits look like and how they're established.

Bill Request or Introduction Limits

Chamber	Authority	Current Request or Introduction Limit
Arizona House	House Rule 8(C)	After the fourth day of session, only seven more bills
California Senate	Senate Rule 22.5	Not more than 40 bills in the (two-year) regular session
California Assembly	Assembly Rule 49	Not more than 50 bills in the (two-year) regular session
Colorado Senate and House	Joint Rule 24(b)	Not more than five bills in a regular session
Florida House	House Rule 5.3	Not more than six bills for a regular session
Indiana Senate	Senate Rule 48	First regular session—no limit Second regular session—not more than 10 bills or joint resolutions
Indiana House	House Rule 108	First regular session—not more than 10 bills Second regular session—not more than five bills
Louisiana Senate and House	Constitution Article 3, Sec. 2(A)	Not more than five bills that were not prefiled
Montana Senate and House	Joint Rule 40-40	Before 5 p.m. on Dec. 5, unlimited. After that, a member may request no more than seven bills or resolutions.
Nevada Senate and Assembly	Joint Rule 14	After a regular legislative session has convened and if submitted before 5 p.m. on the 15th calendar day, not more than 60 requests, in total, from each chamber.
North Carolina House	House Rule 31.1	Not more than 15 public bills
North Dakota Senate	Senate Rule 402	After the eighth legislative day, only three more bills
North Dakota House	House Rule 402	After the third legislative day, only five more bills
Oklahoma House	House custom	Request limit—15 bills
	House Rule 6.4	As principal author, only eight bills during a session
Tennessee Senate	Senate Rule 25	After Thursday of the second week of each annual session, not more than nine general bill introductions
Tennessee House	House Rule 44	Not more than 15 bills during each annual session
Virginia Senate	2016 HJR 37	Not more than a combined total of eight bills and joint resolutions
Virginia House	2016 HJR 37	Resolution—not more than a combined total of five bills and joint resolutions
	House Rule 37	Rule—not more than 15 bills during the regular session of an odd-numbered year
Wyoming Senate	Senate Rule 4-3	Not more than seven bills in any session
	Senate Rule 13-3	Not more than three bills in any budget session
Wyoming House	House Rule 13-1	Not more than five bills in any budget session

Did You Know?

- On average, more than 109,000 bills are introduced in state legislatures each year.
- An average session length is approximately 120 calendar days.
- The ability to consider a large volume of bills is not necessarily compatible with restricted session time.

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