



**SS.7.CG.3.7 Benchmark Clarification 3:** Students will compare and contrast the lawmaking process at the local, state and national levels.

### **Lawmaking at the Local Level**

It is the job of local governments to make communities better places to live. To do this job, local lawmakers have the power to pass ordinances. **Ordinances** are laws that govern a local community. Ordinances must not conflict with state laws, called **statutes**, or with federal laws, called **acts**. Local law enforcement groups (like the police force or sheriff's department) enforce both ordinances and state statutes.

### **Lawmaking at the State Level**

An idea for a law can come from **state legislators**, the **governor**, or even ordinary **citizens**. The process for a bill becoming a law can be as difficult as it is at the federal level.

A bill is an idea for a law proposed in the state legislature. Bills can be proposed in the **Florida House of Representatives** or the **Florida Senate**. The Florida House or Senate **committee** that the bill is assigned to does research on the bill. Many different committees have specific issues they deal with. Every state legislator serves on one or more committees.

After the committee completes its research and discusses the bill, the committee decides if the bill should move forward. If the committee goes ahead with the bill, the bill moves to the full chamber of the legislature where the bill was first introduced (the Florida House or Senate). The members of that chamber debate and vote on the bill. If that chamber votes for the bill (for example, the Florida House of Representatives), it then moves to the other legislative chamber (for example, the Florida Senate) for more debate and discussion. Finally, the other legislative chamber will vote on the bill. If members of that chamber vote for the bill, the governor will be asked to sign the bill into law.

If the Florida process of how a bill becomes a law sounds familiar, that is because it is almost identical to how a bill becomes a law at the federal level. The state legislature has various committees like Congress does. Also, like Congress, the state legislature committees study bills, hold hearings, and revise bills if necessary. Finally, just as in the federal government, both legislative chambers (the Florida House of Representatives and the Senate) must approve a bill, and the governor must sign it before it becomes law.

### **Lawmaking at the National Level**

At the national level, an idea for a law can come from **U.S. Representatives**, **Senators**, the **President**, or even ordinary citizens.

An idea for a law is called a **bill**. Bills can be proposed in either chamber (house) of **Congress** (the **U.S. House of Representatives** or the **U.S. Senate**). Depending on which chamber of Congress proposes the bill, it will be sent to the appropriate committee that deals with the bill's topic. That

committee will research the bill. There are many committees in Congress, and every member of Congress serves on one or more committees.

After the committee researches and discusses the bill, it decides if the bill should move to the next step of becoming a law. If the committee agrees to move the bill ahead, it moves to the full chamber of Congress where the bill was first introduced (either the U.S. House of Representatives or the U.S. Senate) to be debated and then voted on. If that chamber of Congress votes for the bill (for example, the U.S. House of Representatives), the bill moves to the other chamber of Congress (for example, the U.S. Senate) for more debate and discussion. Finally, the other chamber of Congress will vote on the bill. If members of that chamber vote for the bill, the president will then be asked to sign it and make it a law.

If there are more than ten days left in the congressional session, the president may take one of three actions: 1) The president may choose to sign the bill into law, 2) the president may choose to **veto** (reject) the bill, or 3) the president may choose to take no action on the bill. A bill becomes law if the president takes no action on the bill and there are at least ten days left in the congressional session. When the president takes no action with fewer than ten days left in the congressional session, this is called a pocket veto.

**act** - legislation that has passed both houses of Congress, has been signed into law by the president or passed over his veto, and therefore becomes a law

**bill** - a proposal for a law

**citizen** - a legal member of a state and/or country

**committee** - a group of House or Senate (or both) members that discusses and debates proposed bills; they may also discuss issues of interest to the country

**Congress** - the national legislative body of the U.S., made up of the Senate, or upper house, and the House of Representatives, or lower house

**Florida House of Representatives** - the lower house of the Florida legislature

**Florida Senate** - the upper house of the Florida legislature

**governor** - the head of a state government

**ordinance** - a law passed by a city or county affecting local affairs such as traffic, noise, and animal control

**president** - the head of the executive branch

**state legislator** - a member of the Florida House of Representatives (state representative) or Florida Senate (state senator)

**statute** - a law passed at the state level