



Alaska Legislative Processes 101

How is Alaska's legislative branch structured?

The Alaska Legislature is bicameral, consisting of two chambers – the Senate and the House of Representatives. Each senate district is to include one-twentieth of the population. Each house district is supposed to contain, as nearly as possible, one-fortieth of the state population. Under the State Constitution, redistricting is accomplished every ten years after the reporting of the decennial federal census.¹

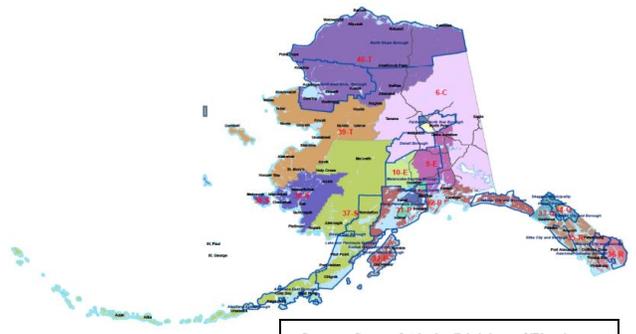
Alaska is divided into twenty Senate districts (A-T), covering the Aleutian Islands to Barrow. There is one senator elected to represent each Senate District, therefore we have twenty Senators serving Alaska's estimated population of 736, 732 ⁱⁱ. Serving four-year terms, Alaska State Senators are led by the Senate President.

For each Senate district, there are two corresponding house districts (1-40), totaling forty members in the House of Representatives. State Representatives serve two-year terms in Alaska, and are presided over by the Speaker of the House.

The two bodies have ten standing committees:

- Education
- Finance
- Health & Social Services
- Judiciary
- Labor & Commerce
- Community & Regional Affairs
- Resources
- Rules
- State Affairs
- Transportation

Additionally, each chamber has eighteen finance sub-committees: Administration, Commerce, Community & Economic Development, Education & Early Development, Environmental Conservation, Fish & Game, Governor, Health & Social Services, Judiciary, Labor & Workforce Development, Law, Legislature, Military & Veteran's Affairs, Natural Resources, Public Safety, Revenue, Transportation & Public Facilities, and University of Alaska. There are nine joint committees between the House and the Senate, eight special committees, and additional other committees created as needed for pertinent state issues.



Source: State of Alaska Division of Elections

STATE OF ALASKA DIVISION OF ELECTIONS HOUSE AND SENATE DISTRICT DESIGNATIONS

Based on "Proclamation of Redistricting" July 14, 2013

SENATE DISTRICT	HOUSE DISTRICT	HOUSE DISTRICT
A	1 Downtown Fairbanks	2 Fairbanks/Wainwright
B	3 North Pole/Badger	4 Western Fairbanks
C	5 Chena Ridge/Airport	6 Eielson/Denali/Upper Yukon/Border Region
D	7 Greater Wasilla	8 Big Lake/Point Mackenzie
E	9 Richardson Hwy/East Mat-Su	10 Rural Mat-Su
F	11 Greater Palmer	12 Chugiak/Gateway
G	13 Fort Richardson/North Eagle River	14 Eagle River/Chugach State Park
H	15 Elmendorf	16 College Gate
I	17 University	18 Spenard
J	19 Mountainview	20 Downtown Anchorage
K	21 West Anchorage	22 Sand Lake
L	23 Taku	24 Oceanview
M	25 Abbott	26 Huffman
N	27 Basher	28 South Anchorage
O	29 North Kenai	30 Kenai/Soldotna
P	31 Homer/South Kenai	32 Kodiak/Cordova/Seldovia
Q	33 Downtown Juneau/Douglas/Haines/Skagway	34 Mendenhall Valley
R	35 Sitka/Petersburg	36 Ketchikan/Wrangell/Metlakatla/Hydraburg
S	37 Bristol Bay/Aleutians/Upper Kuskokwim	38 Lower Kuskokwim
T	39 Bering Straits/Yukon Delta	40 Arctic

When does the Alaska Legislature meet?

The Alaska Legislature convenes their legislative session in Juneau on the second Monday in January – or on the third Tuesday in January following a gubernatorial election - for a period of 120 daysⁱⁱⁱ. If needed, the Alaska Legislature can hold additional special sessions limited to thirty days, or extend the usual 120 day session for up to ten consecutive days – with two-thirds approval of both the House and Senate.

How does a bill get made in Alaska?

A bill can begin as just an idea, created with input from a constituent, legislative staff, professional and non-profit organizations, or legislative committee. A legislator or legislative committee then submits a proposal for a bill to the Legislative Affairs Agency, Legal Services.^{iv}

Once a bill is prepared by Legal Services, the prime sponsor may present the bill to the House or Senate. To carry the bill through the committee process, a bill must be introduced by a legislator, legislative committee, or the Governor through the Rules Committee. It is then referred to appropriate committee(s) for a First Reading of the bill. Typically, most bills receive two or three committees of referral.

The bill sponsor must submit a memorandum to the committee chairs to request a hearing for the bill. At the bill hearing scheduled by the committee Chairperson, the bill is presented to the committee with public testimony, debate is heard, and the committee has opportunities to ask questions of the sponsor. Following their information gathering, the committee members will propose or ask for any modifications of the bill. Once amendments have been made and discussion is over, the bill is voted on by committee members. If the bill receives support, it moves on to the next committee of referral.

After a bill has completed the committee process, it goes back to the House or Senate floor for a second reading. The full body debates and makes amendments as necessary. The House or Senate then votes on the bill, and if it passes, it undergoes the same process in the body where the bill did not originate. If the bill is passed on the other side, it returns to the original body where it was introduced, the Speaker of the House and the Senate President sign it, and it is passed on to the Governor. The Governor then signs, vetoes, or allows the bill to become a law.

Why do some bills die and never become laws?

In the back and forth process between amending a bill in the House and Senate committees, a bill can often get put on hold while it is undergoing review from both sides. When an amendment is requested on the Senate side for a bill that originated on the House side, it must go back to the House for acceptance or rejection. If it is rejected, the Conference Committee has to develop a compromise version of the bill. A compromise bill requires input from both bodies, and can take a long time to reach an agreement that satisfies both bodies. Often times, a bill can get lost in the shuffle or shelved until the next session.

Resources for your legislative research:

Bill Action Status Information System: <http://www.akleg.gov/basis/start.asp>

Find your state legislators using these tools: http://www.elections.alaska.gov/vi_eo_state.php

This whitepaper was published in October 2015. Copies of Alaska Food Coalition White Papers are available on the Alaska Food Coalition website at www.alaskafood.org/materials.

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ⁱ Alaska Legislative Information Office; “The Legislative Process: Separation of Powers”. Constitution of the State of Alaska, Uniform Rules of the Alaska State Legislature.

ⁱⁱ Alaska Census Quick Facts: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/02000.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Alaska State Constitution, Office of the Lieutenant Governor; <http://ltgov.alaska.gov/Mallott/services/alaska-constitution/article-ii-96A0the-legislature.html>

^{iv} Alaska State Constitution, “Legislative Processes”. <http://akleg.gov/docs/pdf/legprocess.pdf>