

The Life Cycle of a Government Bill

Government bills are typically labeled numerically, starting with Bill 1 at the start of a legislative session. The length of a session varies and may be broken down into fall and spring sittings. The Alberta legislature must hold at least one session each year, and the time between the last day of one session and the first day of the next can be no longer than 12 months. Each bill (i.e. proposed law) will proceed through a process from idea to royal assent (which is the monarch's representative at the provincial level, the lieutenant governor, giving final approval to a bill), though as a result of debates and committee reviews, not all bills will receive royal assent and become law.

Currently, in Alberta, a government bill is initiated by the premier, a minister, or a member of legislative assembly (MLA). Legislative counsel is instructed to draft the text of a bill, which is then presented to cabinet as a whole. Following any revisions requested by cabinet, the bill is then passed onto the legislative review committee, which is made up of cabinet ministers and backbench MLAs. This is where strategic planning takes place and the timing of the bill is considered, in addition to a review of the actual text of the draft legislation.

Once a bill passes the legislative review committee stage, it moves on to caucus, which includes all elected members of the party in power, for debate. If there are no revisions at this stage, it is ready for introduction in the Legislative Assembly (also referred to as the House) by the sponsoring minister, and is "read for the first time". After first reading, members of the assembly study the bill and decide whether to support all of it, just some parts of it, or oppose it altogether.

The next stage of the bill's life cycle is second reading, in which members debate the principle or idea within the bill, as opposed to the specific provisions or sections. Members vote on moving the bill to the next stage in the process after each reading.

If the bill passes second reading, it then goes to the committee of the whole, which consists of MLAs meeting as a committee with a chair, rather than as an assembly with a speaker. The committee of the whole looks at the bill in detail, clause by clause if necessary, and sometimes makes amendments as a result of points raised in debate or concerns expressed by constituents.

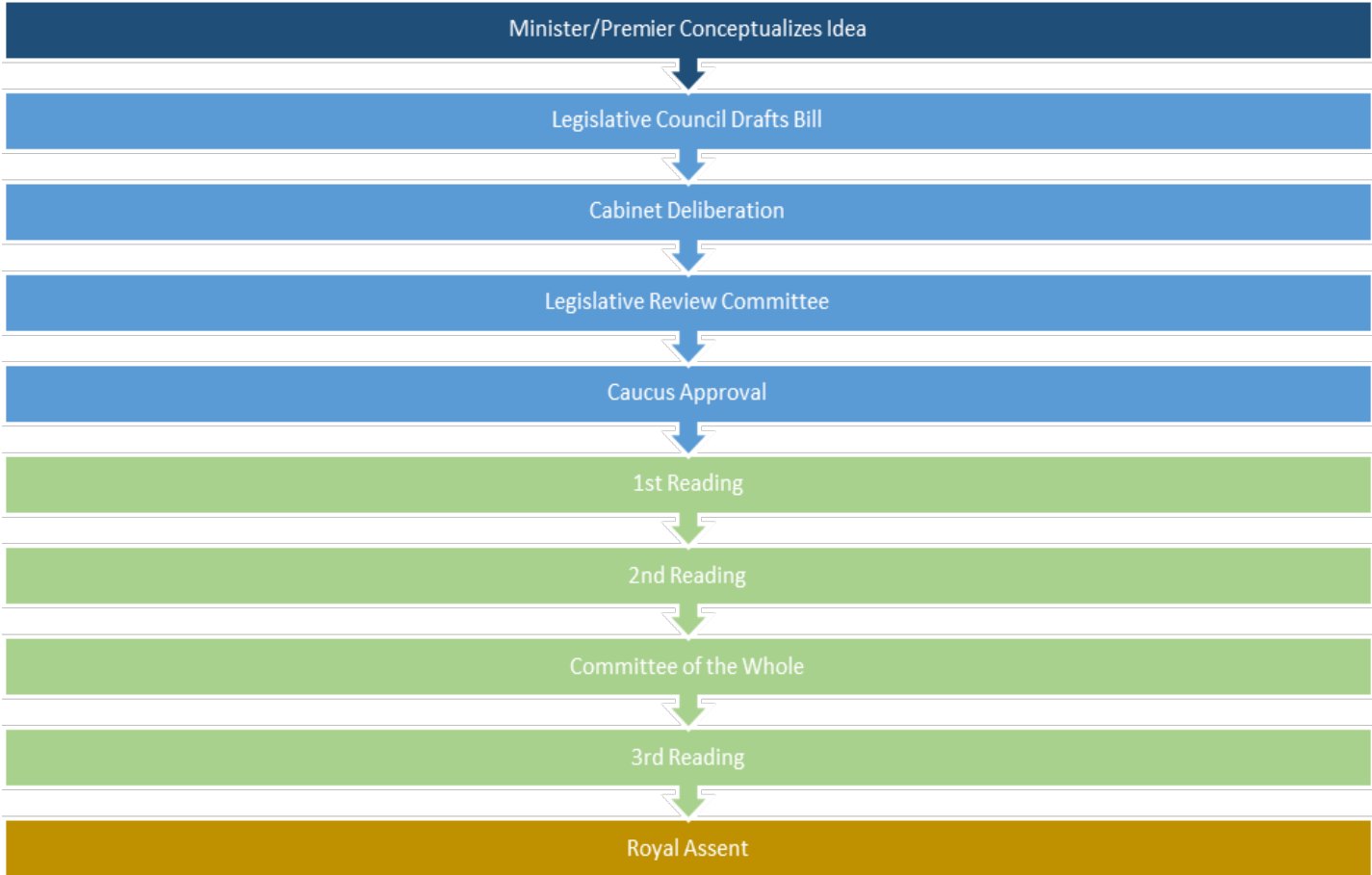
Bills may also be referred to one or more standing committees (i.e. smaller committees made up of MLAs from all parties represented in the assembly that study more specific issues) for a more in-depth analysis.

The final stage of a bill's journey through the assembly is third reading. Again, members have a chance to comment on, criticize, or ask questions about the bill before voting on it for the last time. A bill must proceed through first reading, second reading, committee of the whole, and third reading before it can achieve royal assent and become a law.

The following is a step-by-step flowchart of the progression of a government bill in Alberta.



Flowchart: Life Cycle of a Government Bill in Alberta



Reference: The Citizen’s Guide to the Alberta Legislature, Ninth Edition. To view, [click here](#).

