How to Read a Bill

Listening to legislative debates and reading bill drafts can be daunting for those who are not trained in understanding how the Kansas Legislature operates. For us to strengthen our advocacy muscles, though, we need to feel comfortable and confident in our ability to understand legislation and the steps lawmakers must take to pass policies. By showing both the technical aspects of legislation as well as the jargon used by Topeka insiders, this guide will help average Kansans engage in the legislative process.

1. **Session in which the bill was introduced.**
   While the Kansas Legislature convenes annually (typically, January to May), it operates on a biennial cycle. Due to this cycle, bills held “below the line” but still active between sessions may show the prior year.

2. **Bill number.** House bills (HB) start at number 2001 and Senate bills (SB) start at number 1. They are numbered in the order in which they are introduced. These numbers will continue into the second year of the biennium.

3. **The committee in which the bill was introduced,** not necessarily where it currently resides.

4. **The date the bill was introduced.**

5. **Line numbers.**

6. **Introduction and statute reference number.** The introductory paragraph gives an overview of what the bill is about and includes the statute number of which law the bill would be changing.

7. **Added language.** Proposed changes to law are indicated in italics.

---

Questions? Contact: Mitch Rucker, Early Learning Policy Advisor
mitch@kac.org | (785) 766-2138
adult in a household may have access to the TANF cash assistance benefit.

(B) Any individual that has failed to cooperate with a fraud investigation shall be ineligible to participate in the TANF cash assistance program and the child care subsidy program until the department for children and families determines that such individual is cooperating with the fraud investigation. The department for children and families shall maintain a sufficient level of fraud investigative staff to enable the department to conduct fraud investigations in a timely manner and in full accordance with state law and department rules and regulations or policies.

(A) Food assistance shall not be provided to any person convicted of a felony offense occurring on or after July 1, 2015, which includes as an element of such offense the manufacture, cultivation, distribution, possession or use of a controlled substance or controlled

8. Repeated bill number. The bill number will repeat at the top left of every page.

9. Page number of the bill.

10. Renumbered sections. Bills are organized into sections. (Note: For longer bills, they may be further organized into “articles.”) When language is removed or added to a bill, sections often must be renumbered to remain sequential.

11. Added, removed, or replaced language. The committee or, sometimes, a legislator will introduce language that would make several changes to law. This is shown through removed, added, or replaced language. Language added to a bill is indicated by the use of italics. Removed text is indicated by the use of the strikethrough. Replaced language is indicated by using both of these functions, such as in the above example. These changes could be as small as a single word or number or span several paragraphs and pages.
AN ACT concerning children and minors; relating to eligibility for public benefits; removing cooperation with child support from eligibility requirements for food and child care assistance; exempting qualifying adults enrolled in school from the 20-hour-per-week work requirement for a limited time; amending K.S.A. 2020 Supp. 39-709 and repealing the existing section.

benefits is the child of a minor parent who is working on completion of high school or obtaining a GED;
(iv) adults who are participants in a food assistance employment and training program; and
(v) adults who are participants in an early head start child care partnership program and are working or in school or training; and
(vi) adults enrolled in a public or private nonpublic elementary or secondary school or postsecondary educational institution making progress toward graduation for up to 48 months; or
(vii) adults enrolled in a postsecondary educational institution for at least six credit hours that are required to obtain a degree or certificate for up to 72 months.
Amendment: A change to the original language in a bill. Can be offered in committee or on the floor of a chamber when it is in the Committee of the Whole.

Bill: A piece of legislation, referred to as HB XXXX or SB X, depending in which chamber it originated. Subject to a veto by the governor. Has the potential to turn into law.

Caucus: A group of legislators organized around a common theme. Can refer to all members of the same chamber and party (e.g. House Republican caucus) or same issue (i.e. Early Learning Caucus) or region (Rural Caucus).

Chamber: Colloquial term that can refer to either the House or the Senate.

Committee (Standing): A subset of legislators tasked with crafting, reviewing, debating, and amending bills on a particular topic. Created by the presiding officers of each chamber, subject to approval by the full body, and is comprised of both Republicans and Democrats. At the start of each biennium, members are chosen by the presiding officer of each chamber.

Committee of the Whole: When a chamber is in session to debate legislation, all present members (senators or representatives) debate and vote on the bill and any proposed amendments.

Conference Committee: A committee made up of members of both chambers, as determined by the presiding officer of their respective chambers. Typically comprised of the chair, vice-chair, and ranking minority member of the committees that originally considered the legislation.

Conference Committee Report (CCR): The product of a conference committee negotiation. These reports can contain multiple provisions and pieces of legislation on a similar topic. Once created, these reports are sent to each chamber for a vote. CCRs are not subject to amendments and cannot be separated into parts.

Constitutional Amendment: An amendment offered to the Kansas Constitution. It comes in the form of a concurrent resolution and acts similarly, except that these require a two-thirds majority vote in both chambers and are not subject to a gubernatorial veto. To become law, the proposed amendment will be placed on a statewide ballot on which Kansas registered voters can accept or reject.

Floor: Colloquial term that can refer to either the House or the Senate when all members are gathered.

Germaneness: Technical term for relevance; it is the test an amendment must pass before it can be considered for addition to a bill on the floor. An amendment must be germane to the underlying bill in order to receive a vote. Any member can question the germaneness of an amendment and request a ruling of the Rules Committee.

“Gut and Go”: When a chamber replaces the entire contents of one bill with another. This can occur in committee or on the floor of either chamber. This turns a bill into a substitute bill.

Hearing: A meeting of a standing committee for the purpose of gathering information from experts and stakeholders on a bill or topic.

Majorities: Simple majority – 50 percent + 1 of the legislators eligible to vote in a chamber; Supermajority (or veto-proof majority) – two-thirds of the legislators eligible to vote in a chamber.
Motion to Refer or Re-refer: An attempt by a representative or senator to remove a bill from the debate calendar of the Committee of the Whole and send it back to a standing committee.

Presiding Officer: The leader of a chamber (Speaker of the House or President of the Senate) or committee (chairperson).

Substitute Bill: When the entire contents of a bill are removed and replaced by new legislation, this is known as a substitute bill. Typically shortened to H. Sub. or S. Sub., which stand for House substitute and Senate substitute, respectively. This shows which committee or chamber replaced the original content of the bill. Sometimes this happens multiple times. Whichever chamber is listed first is the one that amended the bill most recently. Example — H. Sub. for Sub. SB 273:

- SB 273 tells us that it was originally a Senate bill
- Sub. SB 273 tells us that the Senate substituted new language into its own bill
- H. Sub. for Sub. SB 273 tells us that the House substituted in new language that replaced the language the Senate had substituted into the original bill.

Resolution: A declaration of the sense of one or both chambers. Requires a simple majority of legislators in the corresponding chamber, or both if it is a concurrent or joint resolution. Does not have the potential to turn into law (except for constitutional amendments).

Veto: Refers to the governor’s power to prevent a bill from turning into law. May be overridden by a vote of two-thirds of the members of both chambers.

ABOUT KAC

Kansas Action for Children (KAC) is a nonprofit advocacy organization working to make Kansas a place where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive.

Based in Topeka, KAC works across the political spectrum to improve the lives of the more than 700,000 children who call Kansas home. We engage in bipartisan advocacy, partnerships, and information-sharing on key issues, including early learning and education, health, and economic security for families.

We work with policymakers, local organizations, and fellow advocates to inform sound policy, foster collaboration, and promote an equitable tax system. For more than 40 years, KAC has been a resource to leaders and advocates who work to ensure a brighter future for every child.