

Illinois

VISITORS' GUIDE
to the
Illinois General Assembly



Land of Lincoln



ILLINOIS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH UNIT

Welcome to the Capitol

The Illinois General Assembly is the main policy-making body for one of the most populous and diverse states in the nation. Legislators come here from places as different as the Chicago Loop and the sparsely populated counties of southern Illinois, all seeking to put the views of people of their districts into law. The results affect all of us in many ways, because most of the laws governing basic human activities—education, marriage and divorce, driving, operating a business, buying or disposing of property—are made by state legislatures rather than Congress.

The General Assembly meets through approximately the first five months of each year. In even-numbered years it considers mostly taxing and spending measures; in odd-numbered years any kind of measure can be considered. If you visit the Capitol early in the year, most of the legislative activity will be in committee hearings in various rooms in the Capitol and Stratton Building. In the spring, legislators spend more and more time in session on the Senate or House floor, considering legislative bills that have come out of committee. After the middle of the year, some legislative commissions continue to work on longer-range proposals, and legislative support agencies do research or draft bills for use in the next session. The Illinois General Assembly follows the usual pattern for passage of bills. A bill may be introduced in either the House or the Senate, where it is referred to committee; if approved by the committee it is voted on by the full house, and if passed by that house sent to the other house.

Unlike the President of the U.S., the Governor of Illinois may not only sign a bill or veto it, but instead reduce or eliminate items of expenditure in an appropriation bill (“item” or “reduction” veto), or even propose an amendment to a bill sent to him (“amendatory” veto). A bill vetoed in whole or in part by the Governor is sent back to the house where it was first introduced. The two houses can accept the Governor’s decision, or override it and enact the bill as originally passed. An override requires a three-fifths vote in each house (except for restoring a reduced appropriation, which requires only a majority).

Legislators' Districts

Each of the 59 legislative districts is divided into two “representative districts.” One senator is elected from each legislative district and one representative is elected from each representative district, which results in a 59-member Senate and a 118-member House of Representatives.

Senate & House Chambers

Senate and House chambers are located on the third floor of the Capitol—the Senate in the north wing and the House of Representatives in the south wing. The floors of the houses are closed to nonmembers during sessions. Legislators may be paged by doorkeepers.

Visiting the Galleries

Galleries are on the fourth floor. Visitors are welcome and may move from one gallery to another during the sessions. Applause, loud talk, etc., is not permitted.

Committee Hearings

You may wish to attend a committee hearing. The schedule is posted on the information boards of the House and Senate, next to the main chamber doors. Hearings are open to the public.



Senate Chamber



House Chamber

General Assembly Leaders



Senator
John J. Cullerton
Senate President



Senator
Christine Radogno
Senate Republican Leader



Representative
Michael J. Madigan
Speaker of the House



Representative
Jim Durkin
House Republican Leader

How to Write to Your Legislator

Legislators pay attention to mail. To communicate effectively:

- Identify the subject of your concern as precisely as possible.
- Explain the effects of the proposal.
- State your position and explain why you hold it.
- Write or type your name and address clearly so the legislator can respond.

Addresses

Senate Post Office, State House, Springfield, IL 62706
House Post Office, Stratton Bldg., Springfield, IL 62706

General Assembly Web site:
www.ilga.gov

Legislative Research Unit Web site:
www.ilga.gov/commission/lru/lru_home.html