

Everything You Need to Know about a Bill

There are two types of legislation: ACTS and RESOLUTIONS.

ACTS are bills that create, amend or repeal existing state laws, which are contained in the Tennessee Code Annotated. Copies of the TCA are available in most libraries and will be available at the assembly.

If you propose to amend or repeal an existing law, you should list the section of the TCA that you are changing.

If you are creating a law, do not refer to a specific section of the TCA.

RESOLUTIONS are an expression of the General Assembly's opinion on matters not related to the TCA. Resolutions may also deal with procedural matters of the General Assembly. It is important to note that the Legislature can legislate in almost any area, so almost all bills will be acts.

PARTS OF A BILL

1. **SPONSORS-** In the upper left-hand corner. First-listed sponsor is the Prime Sponsor. The bill will go to the prime sponsor's committee.
2. **TITLE-** Every bill must have a title which summarizes the effects of the bill. It should be brief and cover the major points of the bill. The first words of the title must be "AN ACT TO" or "A RESOLUTION TO". The title is not amendable or debatable.
3. **ENACTING OR RESOLVING CLAUSE-** There should be only one enacting or resolving clause on each bill, and each bill may have only one purpose. It must take the following form:

Be it enacted (or resolved) by the TENNESSEE YMCA YOUTH
LEGISLATURE
4. **SUBSTANCE-** The substance of the bill should be broken down into sections with each section dealing with a separate matter within the bill. For example: For a bill establishing a Commission on Taxation, Section I would establish the commission: Section II would say how many members would serve on the commission: Section III would define the jurisdiction of the commission, etc.
5. **FISCAL LINE ITEM-** Because we will be passing a balanced state budget, each bill must contain a fiscal line item specifying how much enactment of the law will cost, from where the funds will come, etc. For example, if you require additional, new funds for a project, how will you generate the revenue to pay for it? Are there existing, unused funds in the appropriate department's budget, will you need a tax to raise the money, will you apply for federal funding, etc.?

6. REPEALING CLAUSE- This section takes the following form:

“All laws or parts of laws in conflict with this are hereby repealed.”

7. EFFECTIVE DATE- The last section of the act must state when the act is to take effect using this form:

“This act shall take effect July 1, 2001 the public welfare requiring it.”

Instead of using a specific date, you may also write “immediately upon becoming a law”. This last section is not necessary on resolutions.

A HANDY GUIDE TO BILL PRESENTATION

Whether you are in committee or on the floor, these steps will help in presenting the bill.

1. DOCKET- Keep yourself aware at all times of when your bill will come up on the docket. If you miss your docket spot, your bill will go tumbling down to the bottom of the docket – a fate few bills return from.
2. OPENING REMARKS- When your bill is called, you will have two minutes for your opening remarks. These are precious moments: use them wisely. You do not have to use all two minutes. It is quality, not quantity, that matters. In your opening remarks you will do two things:

Identify the problem – Begin with an attention getter. Tell an anecdote or give a statistic (not more than three) that identifies the problem. You must give them reason to pay attention.

Propose your solution – State your solution in general terms without becoming too abstract. Give as few numbers as possible. Too many numerical figures can easily confuse you as well as the delegates. Keep your plan in the most simple terms possible.

EXAMPLE: For a bill that puts a maximum interest rate on credit cards you could say –

This bill places a maximum limit on the annual percentage rate of credit card accounts. This rate shall be equal to but not greater than four percentage points over the prime interest rate.

Or you could say –

This bill will use a special formula to set a limit on credit card interest rates.

DON'T FORGET TO MOVE PASSAGE AT THE END OF YOUR REMARKS!

3. DEBATE AND QUESTIONS – This can be a very scary time for the simple reason you do not know what will happen. Relax, and don't worry. Have people

practice on your bill ahead of time. Have them ask you the roughest, meanest questions they can. During this period, there are a few important points to remember:

- If a hostile speaker (one who is on a mission to kill your bill) asks you a question and you know he/she is hostile, give him a clear, specific, and LONG answer. Remember the time you spend answering his question is time, which is deducted from his two minutes of speaking time. In other words, the more you talk the less time he has to "torch" your bill.
- ONLY DURING EXTREMELY RARE OCCASIONS SHOULD YOU REQUEST THE FLOOR DURING OPEN DEBATE. The only reason you should speak during open debate is if there seems to be a tremendous misunderstanding about a key point. (e.g. many delegates think that your drunk driving bill is a federal, not a state matter) If such an emergency does arise, remember that you have preference over ALL other delegates including the floor leader. If the speaker fails to recognize you, immediately call a Point of Order.

Kinds of questions you should be prepared to answer:

- 1.) How much will this bill cost?
 - 2.) Where will the money come from?
 - 3.) Who will enforce this?
 - 4.) Is this in conflict with (state constitution, federal constitution, federal law)?
 - 5.) Do other states do this?
 - 6.) Has this been attempted before in the state of Tennessee?
 - 7.) How effective is this going to be, really?
4. CLOSING REMARKS – Here you should briefly answer one, two but no more than three of the major criticisms heard during debate. Even if there were no worthwhile critical statements made, try to respond to the debate somehow. Say something like “I would like to thank the House for its tremendous support of this bill.” This lets everyone know that you were awake for the last ten minutes.

Follow these responses with an iteration of your solution. Do not introduce any new arguments; these will only cloud the issue. Use the same line of argument you have used and end with a real blockbuster of a closing image. May it be a story, a statistic or just a catchy phrase. For a bill on insurance reform, you might close with:

“This bill will ENSURE that our families are ASSURED of a “SURE INSURANCE plan.”

Submitted by Ross Harris, a former Youth in Government participant and 1990 Presiding Officer of the YMCA Conference on National Affairs