

Glossary - Middle School

A

Adjournment Sine Die

The final adjournment of a legislative Session. The Latin translation is “without a day, an indefinite period.”

Amend

To change the wording by inserting and/or removing text of a bill, constitution, etc.

Amendment

A change made to legislation in committee or on the chamber floor that adds to, revises, or deletes language from the legislation.

Amendment, Constitutional

A joint resolution that affects the Constitution and is passed by two General Assembly Sessions separated by a general election of the House of Delegates. At the second Session, a bill must also be passed to place the proposal on a ballot. Final approval is given by voters at a general election.

B

Bicameral

Made up of or having two legislative chambers. Since 1776, the General Assembly has been a bicameral legislature made up of the Senate and House of Delegates.

Biennium

A two-year term of legislative activity, usually used in association with the budget.

Bill

A written document that proposes a new law, amends a law, or repeals an existing law.

Branches

The three distinct sections of government: executive, legislative, and judicial.

Budget

Recommended appropriations of state revenue presented by the Governor to the General Assembly for its consideration during the legislative session.

C

Citizen

A member of a state or nation who owes allegiance to its government and is entitled to its protection.



Committee

A group of legislators from the Senate or House of Delegates organized for the purpose of considering and deciding on the disposition of legislation.

Conference Committee

An even number of legislators from the Senate and the House of Delegates who meet to resolve differences between versions of a specific bill or joint resolution passed by their respective bodies. This usually includes three members from each body.

Conflict of Interest

A position taken by a legislator on a matter that threatens the legislator's ability to vote impartially due to some personal interest in a legislative issue (pursuant to Senate Rule 36 or House Rule 69).

Constituent

A citizen residing within the district of a legislator.

Constitution

A written instrument embodying the fundamental principles of the state that guarantees powers and duties of the government and certain rights to the people.

Constitution

An official document that establishes the basic principles of government.

Counties

The largest local government of most of the United States. Virginia has 95 counties and 39 independent cities. In Virginia, cities are separate and distinct from counties.

D

Dillon Rule

Restricts the authority of local governments with respect to the enactment of ordinances. Local governments only have powers granted by the Constitution of Virginia and/or passed by the General Assembly.

E

Effective Date

Laws become effective July 1 in the year they are passed, unless otherwise specified.

Elect

To select for some office by voting.

Emergency Clause

Due to an emergency, the law becomes effective when signed by the Governor.



Executive Branch

This branch has sole authority and responsibility for the daily administration of the state bureaucracy.
The executive branch does not make laws or interpret them.

F

Floor

That portion of the chamber reserved for members, staff, and other persons granted access during the Session.

Floor Leader

Refers to majority and minority leadership in each house.

J

Judicial Branch

This branch interprets the laws and aims to assure that disputes are resolved justly, promptly, and economically through a court system unified in its structure and administration.

Judicial Review

A constitutional doctrine that gives to a court system the power to annul legislative or executive acts which the judges declare to be unconstitutional.

L

Law

A rule of conduct or action formally recognized as binding or enforced by a controlling authority.

Legislator

An elected member of a legislative body. A legislator in Virginia is known as a Senator or Delegate.

Legislative Branch

This branch is responsible for establishing public policy through legislation. The General Assembly's chief responsibilities are to represent citizens in the formulation of public policy, enact laws of the Commonwealth, approve the budget, levy taxes, elect judges, and confirm appointments by the Governor.

Lobbyist

An individual acting as an agent for a group seeking to bring about passage or defeat of legislation as well as influencing the content of legislation.

M

Majority Leader

A member of the majority party designated to be its floor leader.



Majority Party

The political party having the greater number of members in either house of the legislature.

Minority Leader

A member of the minority party designated to be its floor leader.

Minority Party

The political party having the fewer number of members in either house of the legislature.

P**Patriotic**

Having and showing respect and love for your country.

Political Party

Engaged in or taking sides in politics.

Patron

A legislator who introduces a specific piece of legislation. Other legislators may show their support by signing on as co-patrons.

R**Reconvened Session**

A Session held on the sixth Wednesday after adjournment of each regular or special Session when the legislature meets to consider and act on bills vetoed by the Governor and bills with recommendations by the Governor.

Representative Democracy

A government in which people vote for (elect) a smaller group of citizens to make rules and laws for everyone.

Resolution

A formal expression of a request, mandate, opinion, sense, or constitutional amendment of both houses of the General Assembly. It may also direct that a legislative study be conducted.

Rule of Law

The universal ideal by which the rights of individuals and the collective rights of community are equally recognized by consent under a set of core principles which, through government, are guaranteed and protected.



S

Session

The period of time for which the legislature meets. In even-numbered years, the Session meets for 60 days; in odd-numbered years it meets for 30 days. The Session may be extended for a maximum of 30 days. The odd-numbered year Sessions are usually extended to 46 days.

T

Subcommittee

A group of legislators who are members of a standing committee selected by the committee chairman to consider certain categories of bills. Subcommittees make recommendations to the full committee.

T

Tax

The money that you have to pay to the government so that it can provide public services.

V

Veto

Action by which the Governor refuses to sign legislation passed by the General Assembly. The Governor returns the vetoed bill to its house of origin. A 2/3 vote of each body is required to overturn a veto.

Virginia House of Burgesses

The first elected representative legislative assembly in North America, which met at Jamestown in 1619.

Vote

Formal expression of will or decision by the legislative body.

