

# The Bill Game

## Facilitator's Guide

### About the Bill Game

The Bill Game is an engaging dice game that was developed by Healthy Futures of Texas to teach young people how a bill becomes a law in Texas. Each player takes the part of a bill that is moving through the legislative process. But it won't be easy, because the system is designed to kill bills! Throughout the game, players will learn about the Texas Legislature and the political process.

### Who can play?

The game was designed for high school students. However, it could be appropriate for advanced middle school students. It's also fun for adults! The game is designed to be played by a large group. There are 24 separate bill cards. If you have a group that is larger than 24, you can print duplicate bill cards. We have played with groups as small as 8, and as large as 50.

### I'm not from Texas. Can I still play the game?

The Bill Game is specific to Texas! Lots of things about the Texas legislative process are unique. If you are interested in adapting the game for other states, feel free to reach out to [info@healthyfutures-tx.org](mailto:info@healthyfutures-tx.org).

### How long does the game take?

We recommend scheduling at least 45 minutes for game play and reflection.

### Is the game free to play?

Yup! The game is free and available for anyone to use at the Healthy Futures website. If you play the game, we would love to hear how it went for you! Email us at [info@healthyfutures-tx.org](mailto:info@healthyfutures-tx.org).

### What you'll need

You will need the following:

- A 20-sided dice for each player. A couple of students can share a die if necessary. Dice can be cheaply purchased in bulk. You can also use a dice app such as this one available through Google (<https://g.co/kgs/6gWfDmT>). However, rolling physical dice makes the game more fun and engaging.
- A game board marker for each player, such as a coin, bean, or any small object.
- A printout of the game board. Each player should have their own game board.
- 1 bill card for each player
- Slide deck and projector. We recommend presenting this in Canva to take advantage of slide animations, but you can also use the PDF.

## How does it work?

The facilitator should read through the whole slide deck and facilitator's guide before beginning game play. The facilitator will start the game by giving each player a dice, token, game board and bill card. The facilitator will then open the slide deck and read through each slide. All instructions are contained in the slide deck. At each step of the legislative process, players will attempt to achieve the minimum roll to advance to the next step. If a player fails to roll high enough, they move to the bill graveyard on the bottom left of the board. However, there are chances to be resurrected as an amendment!

## Tell me more about the dice rolls and bonuses

The dice mechanics will be familiar to anyone who has played games like Dungeons & Dragons or Magic: The Gathering. To advance through each stage of the legislative process, the players will have to achieve a minimum dice roll. However, some bills have bonuses or penalties. These bonuses and penalties reflect the fact that some bills have much more support among the people in power!

Slide 5 gives an example of how the dice mechanics work. Bonuses are added to a dice roll. For example, if you need at least a 16 to advance, but you have a +3 bonus, you only need to roll a 13 or higher. However, if you have a -3 penalty, you would need to roll at least a 19.

## Are there any special bills in the game?

Yes! There are several.

- HB 1 is the budget bill. This is the only bill that lawmakers must pass. The Texas Constitution requires lawmakers to pass a balanced budget, and if they can't come to an agreement, lawmakers will have to return for special sessions until they get the job done. The player with HB 1 gets unlimited rolls on all turns, meaning they can roll the dice until they achieve the number they need. We recommend reading the HB 1 card aloud, since the budget is an important part of the legislative session.
- HB 337 is a "messaging" bill, which means that it was filed to send a message, but doesn't have any hope of passing. It is mathematically impossible for HB 337 to win the game. This reflects the reality of legislative work -- some bills are just doomed from the start.

## What is Sine Die and how do you pronounce it?

When someone says Sine Die, they mean the last day of session. Sine die is Latin for "without day." When the legislature "adjourns sine side," it means they have not set a day to come back. It's pronounced sign-ee die, rhyming with heiney-hi, and if you can think of a better rhyme please let us know.

## Are all of the bills real?

Sort of. All the bills are very much based on real life. However, bill numbers and identifying details have been changed to protect the guilty.

## How can I learn more about the Texas legislative process?

Check out "The Legislative Process in Texas," a document written by the Texas Legislative Council, at <https://tlc.texas.gov/docs/legref/legislativeprocess.pdf>.

## **Do the probabilities match real life?**

Sort of. Only about 15% of filed bills in Texas actually make it into law. In the 2023 Legislative Session, 9% of bills filed by Democrats and 20% of bills filed by Republicans made it to the Governor's desk. The Governor vetoed 1% of all bills filed, including 6% of all bills that made it to his desk.

A bill with a 0+ bonus has about a 15% chance of winning the game, and many key points, like getting a hearing or a veto, reflect real-world chances of success or failure. In actual game play, a somewhat higher percentage of players will likely win, because the bill cards include more bills that have large bonuses. However, players should still come away with the understanding that the system is designed to kill bills.

The bill bonuses reflect that fact that a high-profile bill with strong support from the leadership like the Governor, Speaker of the House, or Lieutenant Governor has a higher chance of passing than a normal bill. A bill filed by the party in power is twice as likely to pass as a bill filed by the minority party. This may not feel fair to players, but that's intentional, because it shows what the legislative process is really like.

## **Does the Bill Game meet any Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)?**

The US Government TEKS have a learning expectation that, "The student understands the structure and functions of the government created by the U.S. Constitution. The student is expected to analyze the structure and functions of the legislative branch of government, including the bicameral structure of Congress, the role of committees, and the procedure for enacting laws." That standard is referencing the federal government, so the Bill Game may not directly address the learning expectation, but it's still a good way to help students understand the complex legislative process.

## **Why did you make the Bill Game?**

The Bill Game was developed for the Healthy Futures Youth Advocates Program, which empowers high school students with civic engagement skills. Our Youth Advocates asked for more information on how the legislative process works, so we developed this game as a fun learning experience for them. Thank you to our San Antonio, Dallas, and Brownsville cohorts for providing feedback on early versions of the game.

## **Who designed the Bill Game?**

The Bill Game was designed by Jen Biundo, Senior Director of Policy and Research for Healthy Futures of Texas. Jen has a Master's Degree in Public Affairs from the LBJ School of Public Affairs at UT Austin, and holds a certification in public health. As a non-profit lobbyist, she works to support adolescent health in Texas. She oversees the Healthy Futures Youth Advocates program. She was previously a legislative staffer, and has worked in or around the Capitol for 15 years. Jen is the proud mom of two boys, including a teenager who kind of wishes his mom had a normal job that didn't involve sex education. In her spare time, she enjoys travel, throwing over the top dinner parties, reading, whittling, and analyzing ballot returns by precinct. Jen can be reached at [jbiundo@healthyfutures-tx.org](mailto:jbiundo@healthyfutures-tx.org).

The mission of Healthy Futures of Texas is to improve the well-being of young Texans through equitable access to sexual health education, contraception, and resources.

# Vocabulary

- **Amendment:** A proposed change to a bill as it moves through the legislative process.
- **Author:** The legislator who files a bill and guides it through the legislative process.
- **Bill:** A proposed change to state law. Also called legislation.
- **Christmas Tree:** A slang term for a bill that is likely to pass, and has other dying bills amended onto it. It's called a Christmas tree because it has a lot of ornaments, or amendments.
- **Committee:** A group of legislators appointed by the Speaker of the House or Lieutenant Governor, addressing topic areas like education, health, transportation, etc. Every bill is referred to a committee based on the topics it addresses.
- **Conference Committee:** A group of 5 members from the House and 5 members from the Senate who are assigned to resolve the differences between the house and senate versions of a bill. These members are called "conferees" (pronounced confer-ees.)
- **Engrossment:** The stage in a bill's legislative progress when it has been passed by the chamber in which it was filed.
- **Enrollment:** The stage in a bill's legislative progress when it has been passed by both chambers of the legislature in identical form.
- **Filed:** A term that means that a bill has been introduced into the legislative process and given a number.
- **Fiscal Note:** An estimate prepared by the Legislative Budget Board of the probable costs or savings or the probable revenue gains or losses that the state would incur from implementing legislation.
- **Floor:** A term traditionally used for the meeting chamber of either house.
- **House of Representatives:** The lower chamber of the Texas Legislature, consisting of 150 members, all of whom are elected by Texas voters every two years for two-year terms.
- **Legislature:** The lawmaking body of the State of Texas, which consists of two chambers, the House of Representatives and the Senate.
- **Lieutenant Governor:** The presiding officer or president of the Texas Senate. A member of the executive branch, the lieutenant governor is elected by voters statewide to a four-year term.
- **Public Hearing:** A meeting of a House or Senate committee or subcommittee during which public testimony may be heard.
- **Senate:** The upper chamber of the Texas Legislature, consisting of 31 members serving four year terms, half of whom are elected by voters every two years.
- **Session or Legislative Session:** The period during which the legislature meets. The regular session convenes every odd-numbered year and may last no more than 140 days. A called session, commonly referred to as a special session, is so designated because it must be called by the governor. A called or special session may last no more than 30 days.
- **Sine Die:** A Latin term meaning "without day" that is used to signify the final adjournment of a session of a legislative body. The body adjourns sine die when it adjourns without appointing a day on which to appear or assemble again. Pronounced sign-ee die.
- **Speaker of the House:** The presiding officer of the House of Representatives elected from and by the membership of the house at the beginning of each regular session.
- **Veto:** The authority of the governor to reject an enrolled bill.

Vocabulary adapted from "Texas Legislative Glossary," a publication of the Texas Legislative Council, <https://tlc.texas.gov/docs/legref/Glossary.pdf>