



The Bill Game

»» by Healthy Futures of Texas

The Texas Legislature



The **Texas Legislature** has two **chambers**: the **Senate** and the **House of Representatives**. The 31 Senators and 150 Representatives meet in the Capitol building in Austin. The Senate is led by the **Lieutenant Governor** who is elected by Texas voters, while the House members select the **Speaker of the House** from among themselves.

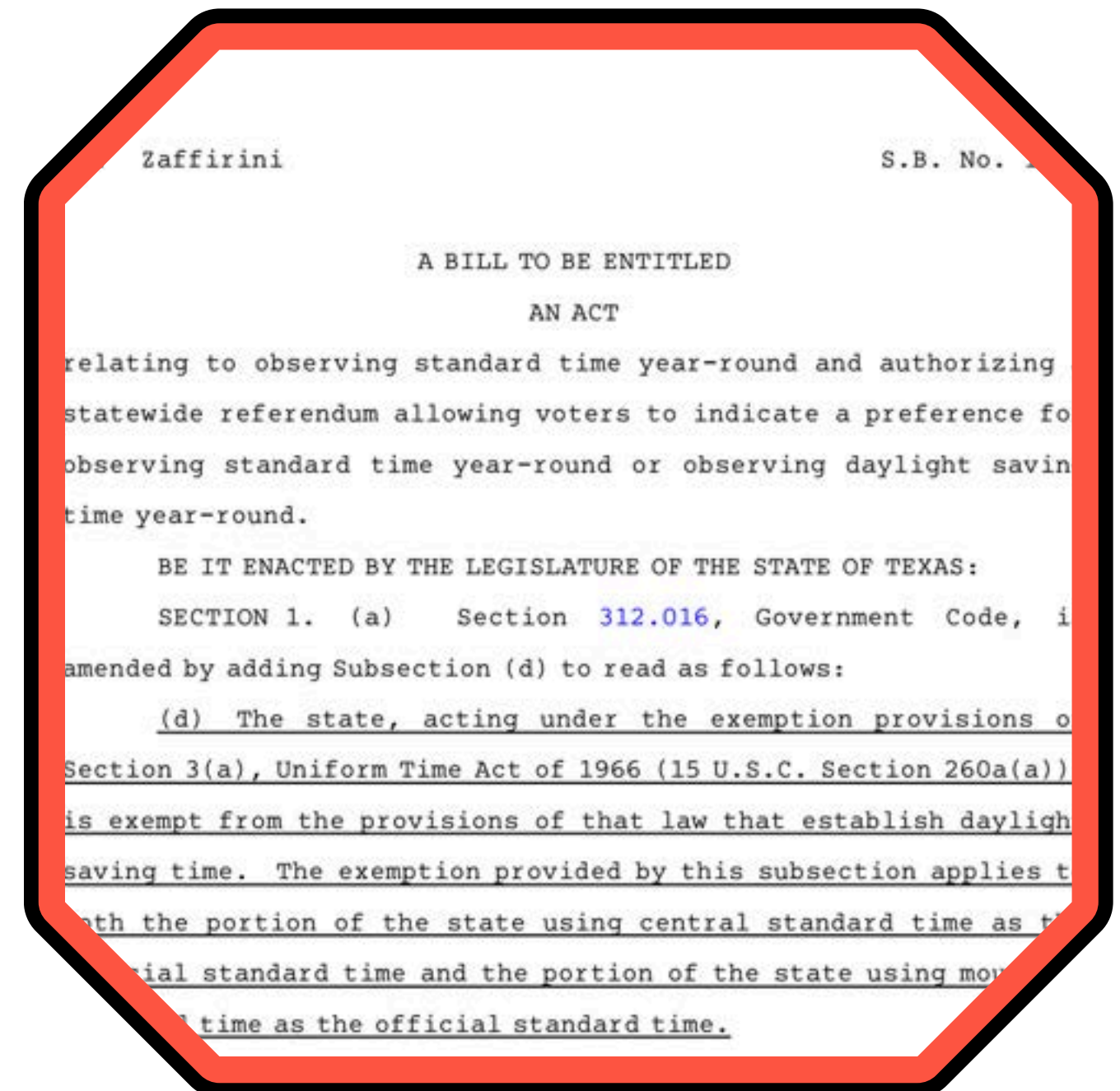
The Texas Legislature meets every other year, in odd-numbered years, and only from January - May (unless the governor calls a special session). **This means that every bill trying to get passed is running against the clock.**

A **bill**, also known as **legislation**, is a **proposed change to state law**.

An “HB” is a House bill filed by a representative, and an “SB” is a Senate bill filed by a senator. Each bill is assigned a number, like HB 100 or SB 12.

Underlined text in the bill means that new language is proposed to be added to state law, while ~~strikethroughs~~ mean that language would be removed.

Bills travel a long hard path to become a law -- **and most of them don't make it.**



You are a bill!

Let's see if you can become a law.

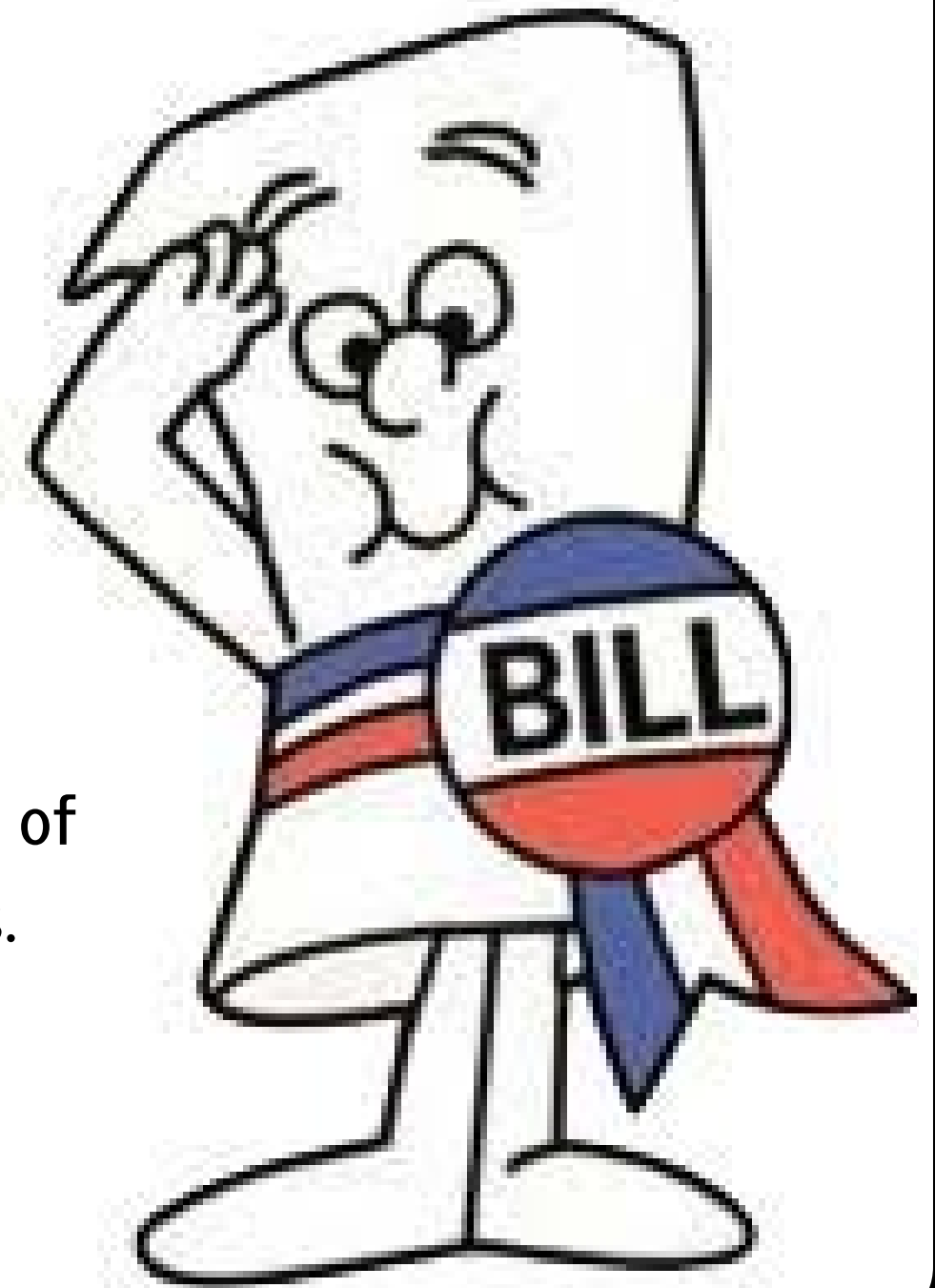
But it won't be easy. In the 2023 Texas Legislative session, there were more than 8,000 bills filed, and only about 15% of them became law.

That's why we often say that the system is **designed to kill bills.**

Instructions:

- You should have a game board, bill card, game token, and 20-sided dice.
- Write your **first** and **second** chamber stats in the **bonus box** on the top of your game board. You will add or subtract these bonuses from your rolls. (We'll practice this in a second.)
- Read your bill out loud to the class or to your group

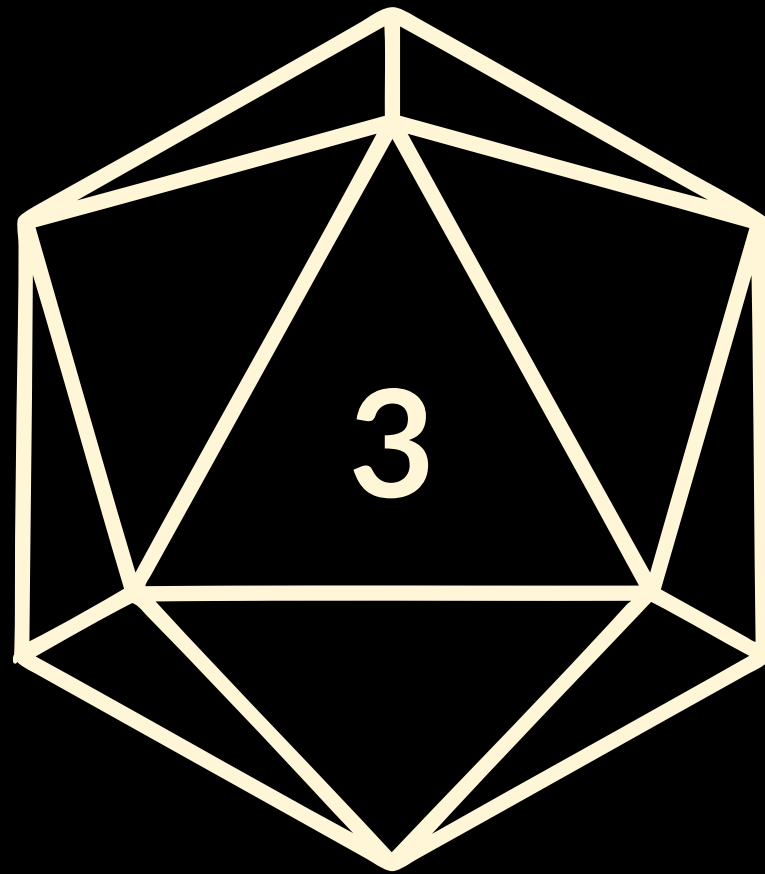
Everyone put your token on: Bill filing



Practice roll

You have a **+5 bonus** and you need to achieve at least a **7** to pass

You rolled:



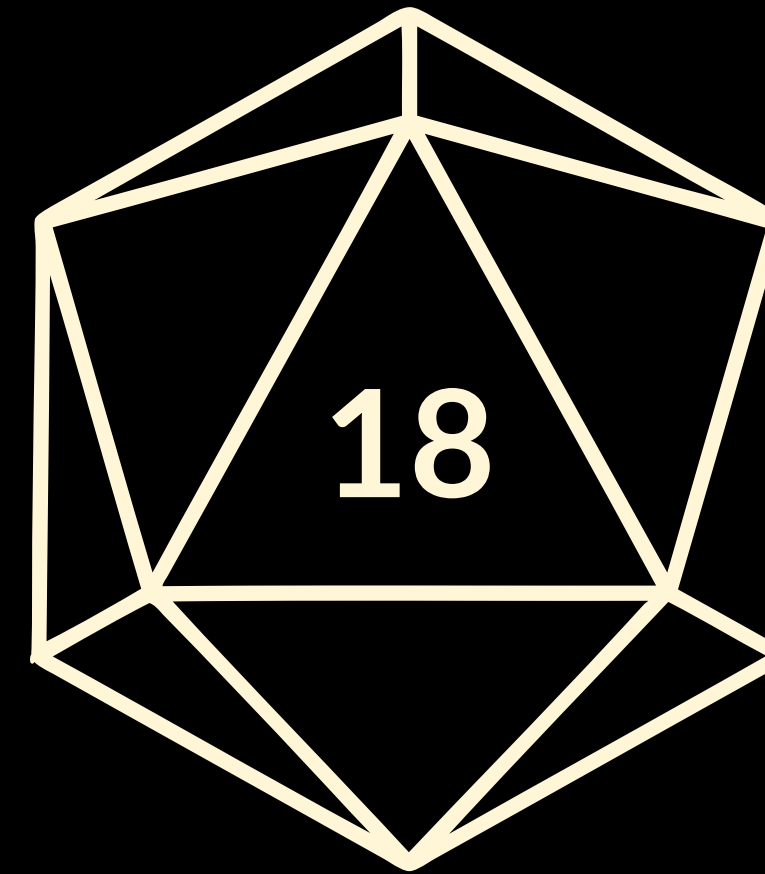
$$3 + 5 = 8$$

8 is bigger than 7

You passed!

You have a **-3 penalty** and you need to achieve at least a **16** to pass

You rolled:

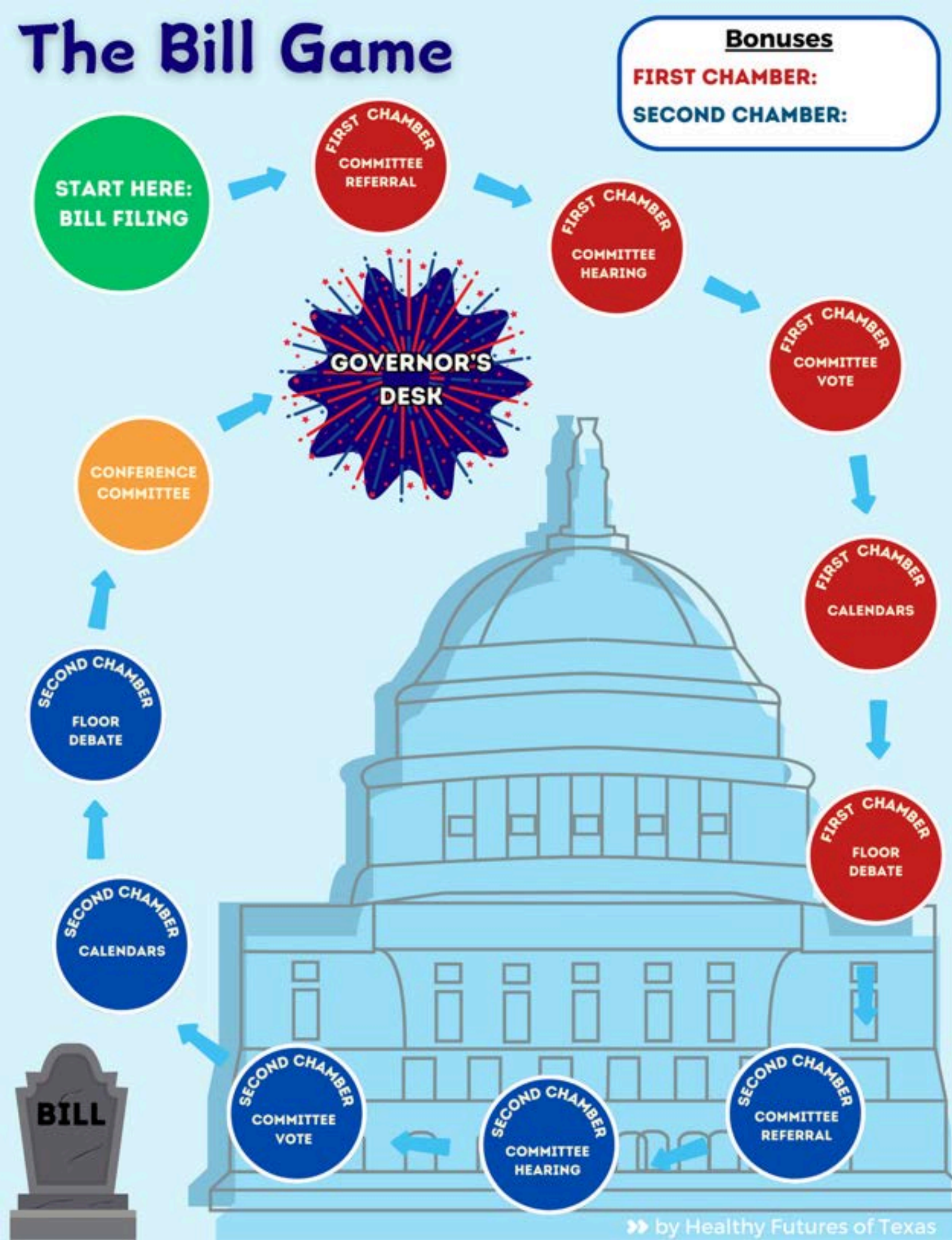


$$18 - 3 = 15.$$

15 is less than 16

Sorry, you didn't pass.

The Bill Game



The Path Ahead

To become a law, a bill has to receive approval from both the House and the Senate.

A House bill starts the process in the House and then moves to the Senate to do it all over again, while a Senate bill starts on the Senate side and then moves to the House. This is what “first chamber” and “second chamber” means on your game board.

Almost every step of the process is a point where a bill can die -- but some steps are more dangerous than others. **Let's play and find out.**



Committee Referral

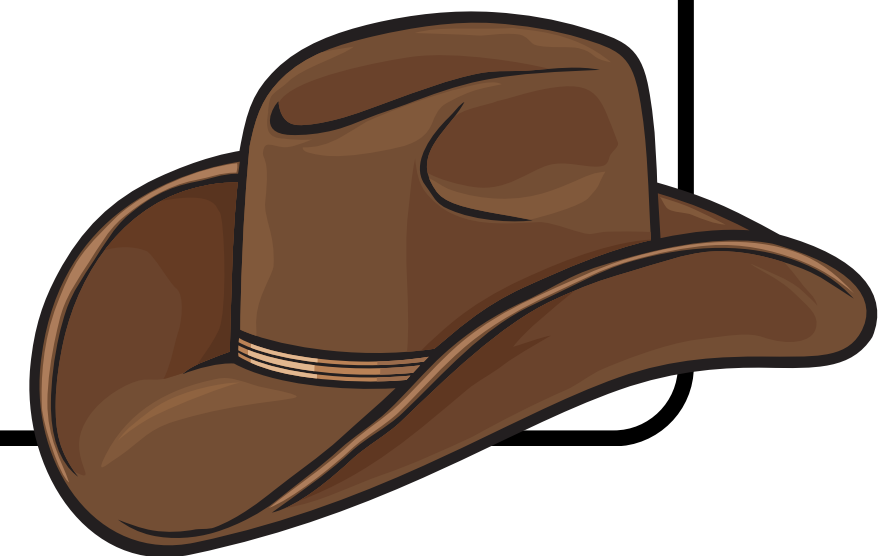
It's January. The legislative session has just started and the Capitol is buzzing with energy! Now it's time for bills to be referred to a committee. The House has more than 40 committees, and the Senate has about 20. About 9 - 15 members are assigned to each committee, which cover topics like education, public health, transportation, and many more. If you are a House bill, you will be referred to a House committee, while Senate bills are referred to Senate committees.

Instructions

Roll to see if you get referred to a committee.

Number needed to pass: No minimum! All bills get referred to a committee as the first step.

Everyone move to: Committee Referral, First Chamber





Committee Hearing

The first challenge is getting a committee hearing. During session, committees hold meetings at least weekly. Often, about 10 - 15 bills will be posted at each hearing. At committee hearings, members of the public can show up and testify for or against bills. This is also when bills get a **fiscal note**, or an estimate of how much it would cost the state to implement the bill.

Instructions

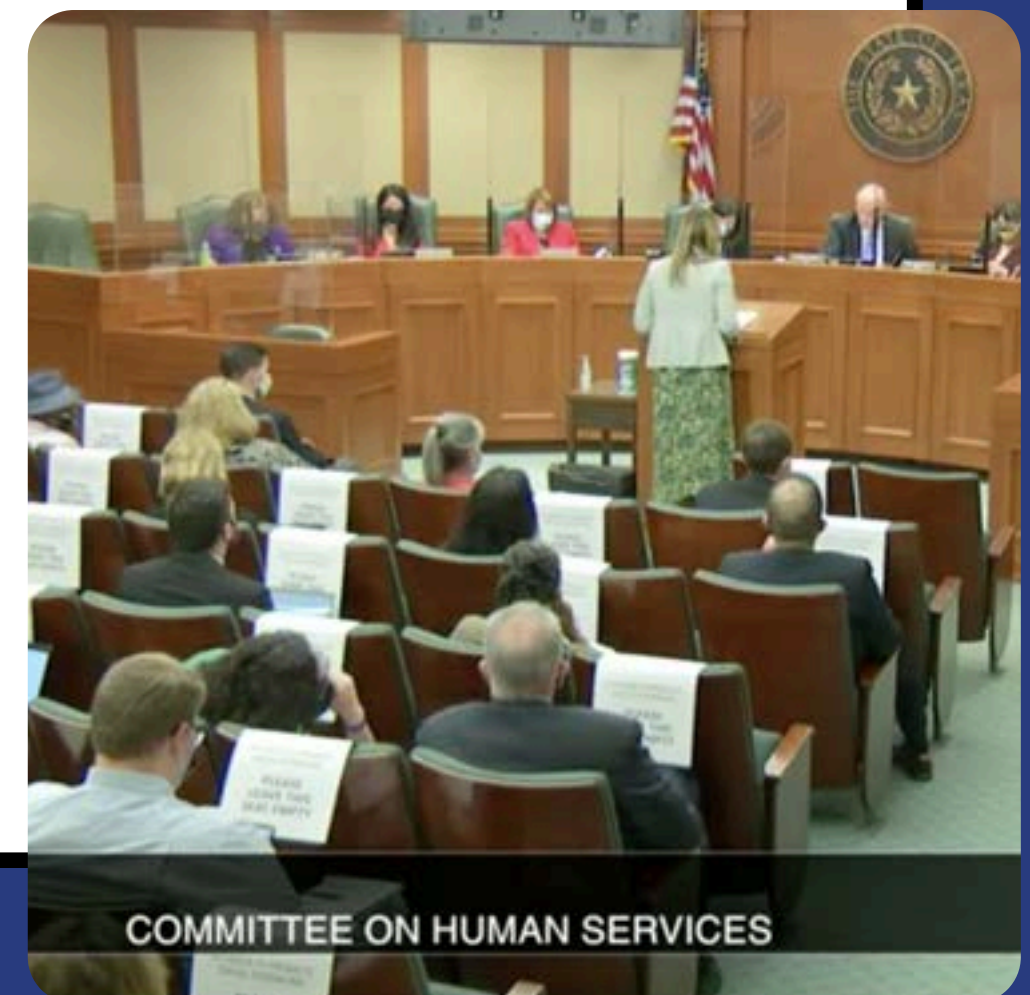
Roll to see if you get a committee hearing.

Number needed to pass: 16. If you fail, try one more time.

If you passed, move to: Committee Hearing, First Chamber

If you failed, move to: Bill Graveyard

The system is designed to kill bills, and this is often where it happens! **Less than half of bills even get a committee hearing.**



Committee Vote

After the bill hearing, committee members can vote on the bill. A bill needs a majority vote of the committee to be passed out of committee. Members may also choose to **amend**, or change, the bill. Members can also simply leave the bill pending in committee and not put it to a vote.

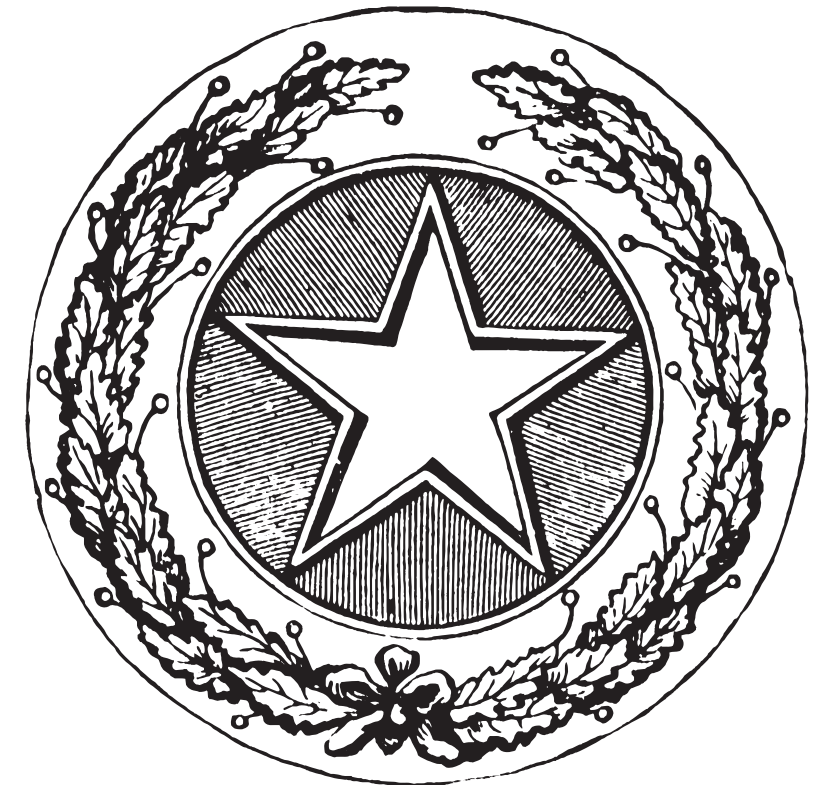
Instructions

Roll to see if you pass out of committee.

Number needed to pass: 6. If you fail, try one more time.

If you passed, move to: Committee Vote, first chamber

If you failed, move to: Bill Graveyard



Calendars

In the House, the powerful (and somewhat mysterious) Calendars Committee meets behind closed doors to decide which bills that have been voted out of committee will be scheduled for a floor debate. The Senate has a calendaring process that is set by the Lieutenant Governor.

Instructions

Roll to see if Calendars schedules you for floor debate.

Number needed to pass: **7**. If you fail, try one more time.

If you passed, move to: Calendars

If you failed, move to: Bill Graveyard

Floor Debate

It's your big day! You're on the floor of the House or Senate chamber being debated by all of the representatives or senators. You may be amended one or more times. All of the members of the first chamber will vote on whether or not to let you advance.

Instructions

Roll to see if you are adopted by the full chamber.

Number needed to pass: 5. If you fail, try once more.

If you passed, move to: Floor debate, first chamber

If you failed, move to: Bill Graveyard



You did it!

You passed the first chamber! Congratulations, you are **engrossed**! This means that you have made it through the first chamber. But bad news, now you have to do it all over again – and in a new chamber that may be less friendly to you. If you are a House bill, you are now making your way through the Senate, and if you are a Senate bill, now you are in the House. Every bill that is sent to the second chamber gets another committee referral.

If you have different bonuses for the first and second chamber, start using the **second chamber bonus.**

Move your token to: Committee Referral, second chamber

Committee Hearing, 2nd Chamber

It's April, and there's not much time to spare. Now you need a hearing in the second chamber. Let's see if the new committee chair is your fan and is willing to schedule you for a hearing. Again, members of the public may come and testify.

Instructions

Roll to see if you get a committee hearing.

Number needed to pass: 12. If you fail, you have one more chance to roll a **14.**

If you passed, move to: Committee Hearing, Second Chamber

If you failed, move to: Bill Graveyard



Crazy things happen late in the session! If you have been eliminated, your bill author is working hard behind the scenes to amend you on to another moving bill. Sometimes people refer to this type of bill as a **Christmas tree**, because it has a lot of ornaments on it.

Instructions

If you have been eliminated at any point in the game, roll to be an amendment. (Use the higher of your bonuses).

If you roll at least a **16**, congratulations, you are a Christmas tree ornament! Move your game piece to the **committee hearing, second chamber**. For the rest of the game, use your first committee bonus.

Committee Vote, 2nd Chamber

The clock is ticking, and the second committee still needs to vote you out. You may be amended again – and your original bill author may not like what they've done with you!

Instructions

Roll to see if you get voted out of committee.

Number needed to pass: 7. No re-rolls.

If you passed, move to: Committee Vote, second chamber

If you failed, move to: Bill Graveyard



Calendars, second chamber

It's back to calendars in the opposite chamber. We're in the last few days of session now, and things are getting crazy. Everyone is exhausted and cranky. Staffers are quietly crying in the back corners of the capitol, and the lobbyists are running on caffeine and panic.

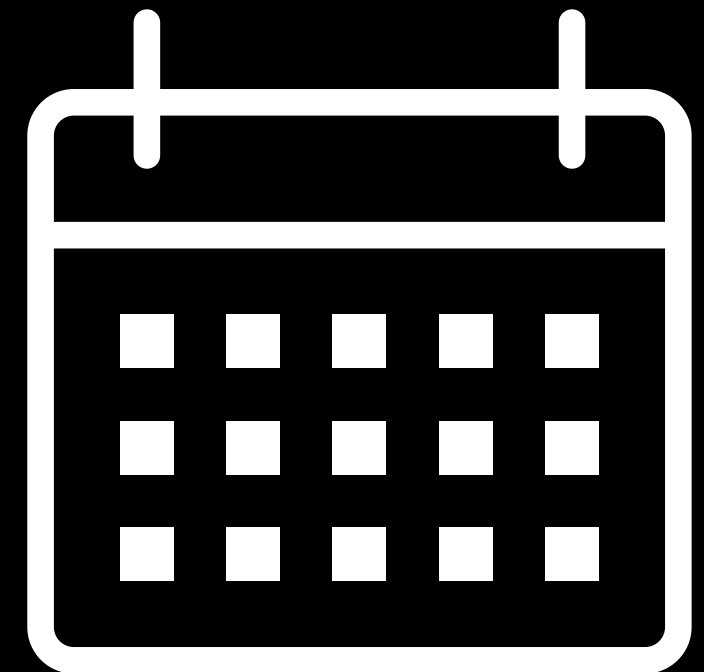
Instructions

Roll to see if you get scheduled for floor debate in the second chamber.

Number needed to pass: 7. If you fail, roll once more for an **11.**

If you passed, move to: Calendars, second chamber

If you failed, move to: Bill Graveyard





Your bill author is still making deals and fighting hard to amend you on to another moving bill.

Instructions

If you have been eliminated at any point in the game, roll to be an amendment. (Use the higher of your bonuses).

If you roll at least a **16**, congratulations, you are a Christmas tree ornament! Move your game piece to **Calendars, second chamber**. For the rest of the game, use your **first chamber bonus**.

Floor Debate, 2nd Chamber

It's floor vote time in the second chamber, and you are running hard against legislative deadlines. It's late May, and everyone wants to go home.

Let's see what they think of you.

Instructions

Roll to see if you get passed out of the second chamber.

Number needed to pass: 6. If you fail, roll once more for a **16.**

If you passed, move to: Floor Debate, Second Chamber

If you failed, move to: Bill Graveyard



Conference Committee

Congratulations! You passed the second chamber! But you've been down a long hard road, and a lot of folks stuck a lot of amendments on you. The version of you that came out of the House looks very different than the version that the Senate passed. It's unclear if the two sides can agree. You need to go to **conference committee** to see if they can hash out differences. The House and Senate each will appoint **5 conferees** who will meet behind closed doors and try to come to an agreement.

Instructions

Roll to see if the conferees can come to an agreement.

Number needed to pass: 5. No re-rolls. Use the higher bonus.

If you passed, move to: Conference Committee

If you failed, move to: Bill Graveyard



Governor's Desk

Hooray! You are **enrolled**, meaning you have passed both chambers, and the legislature has **adjourned Sine Die**. But you still have one final hurdle. Now you're headed to the governor's desk. Let's see if he signs you into law! Hope he doesn't have his **veto** pen handy.

Instructions

Roll to see if the Governor signs you or vetos you.

Number needed to pass: 2. No bonuses apply.

If you passed: Congratulations! It was a long hard road, but you have graduated from a bill to a law! Most bills that pass during a regular legislative session go into effect on September 1.

If you failed: Sorry, the governor vetoed you. Oh well, there's always next session!





What did you think?

- ★ Who made it all the way through?
- ★ What questions do you still have about the legislative process?
- ★ Does it seem like a good system? Why do you think it's set up this way?
- ★ Was the bill process harder or easier than you expected?
- ★ How did the game feel?
- ★ What surprised you?

Credits

The Bill Game was designed by Jen Biundo, Senior Director of Policy and Research at 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, which empowers high school students with civic engagement skills. 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. Jen can be reached at 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.



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Advancing informed
sexual health decisions