

# Civics 101: Virginia's legislative process What you should've learned in High School Civics if you were paying attention

Virginia Diabetes Council

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# Topics

- Policies and how they drive our world
- Primer on how bills get made into law in Virginia

# Policies (and politics)

- Question often heard in Richmond?
  - “Can we agree on the underlying policy and then figure out the law?”
- In the world of health services, policies drive the (healthcare) work.
- Policy
  - A program of actions adopted by an individual, group, or government, or the set of principles on which they are based.
  - Shrewdness or prudence, especially in the pursuit of a particular course of action\*

\*Microsoft Encarta Dictionary

# Examples of just a few questions regarding policies

- Policies in the workplace on hours worked, vacation time, leave without pay, and so forth. What are the underlying principles?
- Policies governing the work. Who gets services? How much service is provided? What are the deliverables? What are the underlying principles? Who develops the policies? Implements them?
- Policies governing health care. What are the statutes governing the practice of each of the health care providers? The regulations? What are the underlying principles? Who develops the policies? Who implements them?
- Policies governing the funding of health care. What are the underlying principles concerning belief in health care: a right or a privilege? If health care is funded, what other services may be underfunded?

# Understanding the process



# Review on three branches of government

- Legislative

- General Assembly
- Congress
- City Council

- Executive

- Governor
- President
- Mayor



- Judicial

- Courts
- Commonwealth attorneys



# The Virginia General Assembly: tidbits

- Citizen legislature: every member of the General Assembly is part-time
- House of Delegates (HOD)
  - 100 members
  - 2-year terms
  - Elected every odd year
- Senate:
  - 40 members
  - Elected every four years in odd years

# The Virginia General Assembly Calendar

- Each even year
  - 60-day session
  - New members (every other year, HOD, every four years, Senate)
  - Budget adopted
- Each odd year
  - 45-day session
  - No new members (unless special election)
  - Budget amended

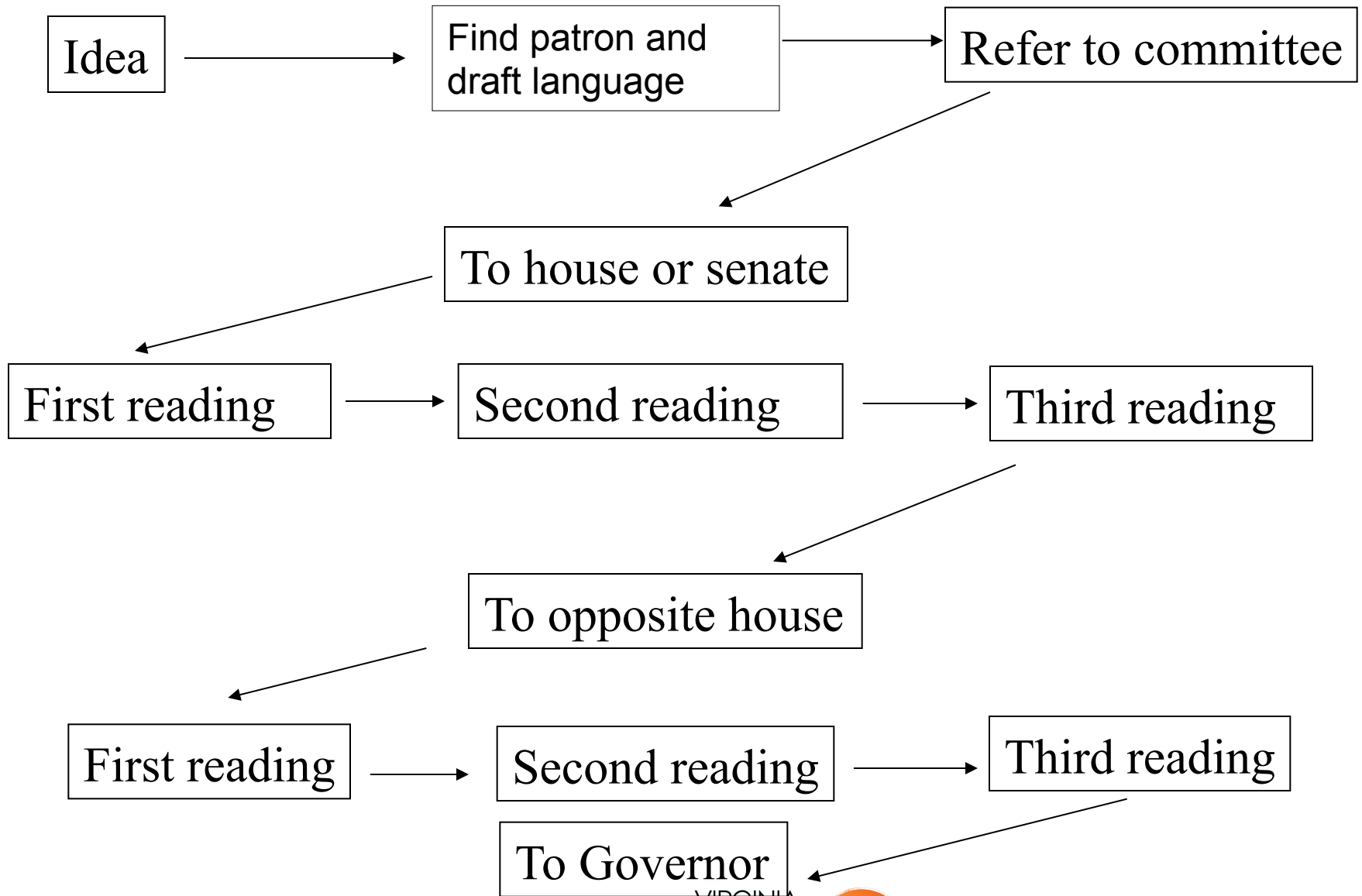


## Bills: From idea into reality

- Constituents (like you!) express need for a change in law
- Need expressed to legislator or member of executive branch
- Need put into legislative language
- Bill assigned to committee
- Committee acts on bill
  - Amendments

## From idea into reality (continued)

- House acts
- Passed bill “crosses over” to other house
- Process repeated
- Bill passes
- Same bill must pass in both houses
- Passed bill on to the Governor
- **Governor signs into law effective (usually) July 1<sup>st</sup>**
- Bills may be carried over in the first year of the biennium (even year)



# Of all bills introduced in the General Assembly each year, one has priority: the budget bill

- The fiscal year for Virginia: July 1 – June 30
- In December of odd years: the Governor introduces the budget bill for appropriating all funds in the next biennium.
- In December of even years: the Governor introduces the budget bill to amend the budget for year 02 of the biennium (beginning in July of the following year).
- Three “money” committees of the General Assembly
  - Senate Finance: in charge of appropriations and revenues from the Senate’s perspective
  - House Appropriations and House Finance Committees
    - Appropriations works on, well, appropriations
    - Finance works on tax revenue bills
- The goal is to agree to a budget bill by the close of the General Assembly each year

# Virginia Budget Process Annual Timeline

- Mid-December: Governor presents his budget bill before the “money” committees
  - Stakeholder feeding frenzy ensues
- Approximately first week of January: Regional Legislative Budget Hearings
  - Citizen testimony presented on all matter of budgetary “asks”
- First week of session: Legislator budget amendment deadline
  - No proposed changes accepted after this date
- Approx. early February: “*Money*” committees release their committee-approved budget amendments
- Approx. mid-February:
  - Each house approves their own budget versions and disapproves the opposing house version and conference committee appointed
- Approx. end of February (short session) or second week of March (long session):
  - Conference report delivered
  - Approx. mid March: Final approval and adjournment
  - Approx early to mid April: reconvened session to determine Governor’s changes to budget

# Public ADVOCACY

**Advocacy: active verbal support for a cause or position**

- A specific policy
- A specific principle underlying the policy (the principles drive the policies).

**VDC: what is the potential for VDC to advocate for the mission/vision of the Council?**