

LIVELY EXPERIMENT

In 1663, when the King of England, Charles II, set forth the “lively experiment” in the Royal Charter, which was to become the foundation of all future Rhode Island government, no one knew how that experiment would turn out.

More than 340 years ago, there was little practical experience to make forecasts about democracy. England had just restored the monarchy following a long representative parliamentary experiment wherein Charles’ predecessor had been beheaded. A civil war had wracked the country already divided into aristocratic Cavaliers (Charles I loyalists), Roundheads (a people’s army), and church leaders fighting for political advantage and religious agendas. However, in the end a military dictator, Oliver Cromwell, quelled disorder by force.

Across the sea, thousands of miles from the political turmoil of England, a different version of governing was taking shape because of the Royal Charter granted to John Clarke and the “purchasers and free inhabitants of our island, called Rhode Island.” This representative government, based on the votes of heads of households in town meetings scattered around the shores of Narragansett Bay in the midst of a Native American population outnumbering English settlers 10 or 15 to one, was not only progressive, but truly visionary.

A quarter century before the English Parliament triumphed over the monarchy in “The Glorious Revolution of 1688,” and a full century before the Enlightenment ideas of separation of powers and checks and balances, the Charter of 1663 created the Rhode Island General Assembly. At that time the General Assembly was the most independent, self-governing democracy in the world. It was all powerful then: executive, legislative, and judiciary all rolled into one. Today it still retains much of that power.

Even as the evolution of this democracy continues today, the General Assembly remains a remarkable, durable invention originating in that experiment of long ago.



South Entrance Inscription

USEFUL WORDS

ACT	A bill passed by the Senate and the House.
ADJOURNMENT	The end of a legislative day or the end of the legislative session for a given year.
AMEND	To formally modify proposed legislation by adding or deleting language.
APPROPRIATION	Authorization for the expenditure of public funds for a stated purpose.
AT THE RISE	An expression used to indicate a definite/indefinite time when a committee is scheduled to meet. It refers to the end of the day’s session when the membership “rises” in adjournment.
BILL	A draft of proposed legislation presented for enactment.
CALENDAR	List of bills awaiting final action by either chamber.
CAUCUS	Meeting of legislators of the same political party to decide policy and course of action.
DEBATE	Formal discussion on legislation on the floor of either chamber.
ENABLING ACT	A law that permits a state official or a government unit to take specific action.
FLOOR	The principal area of the House and Senate chambers where members deliberate and vote.
HEARING	A formal meeting of a committee or commission at which testimony on legislation is presented.
INTRODUCTION	The initial presentation of a bill.
JOURNAL	Official record of daily proceedings of the Senate and House.
LOBBYIST	A person hired by others to influence the legislative process.
POINT OF ORDER	A question raised by a legislator concerning the rules of procedure.
QUORUM	The number of members required for the conduct of business.
RECOMMITTAL	Sending a bill back to the committee that reported it out for consideration.
RESOLUTION	Expresses the will of the legislature, but does not have the authority of law.
SESSION	The period, usually from January to July, when the legislature meets and carries on its business.



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ELECTRONIC GATEWAY

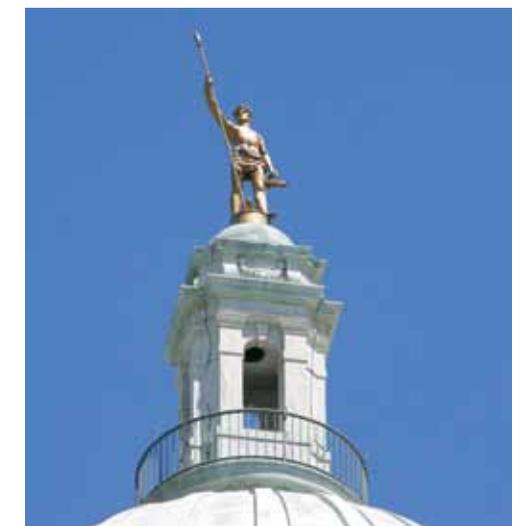
Legislative Data Systems is responsible for developing the General Assembly’s data bank and making legislative information available to the general public. This agency also maintains the General Assembly’s Web site (www.rilin.state.ri.us) which provides a wide range of electronic products. By serving as an electronic gateway into the State House, it allows Rhode Islanders and anyone with computer access to track legislation and the work of the General Assembly.



ELECTRONIC PRODUCTS:

- ▲ Text of proposed legislation
- ▲ Laws (Public Laws) enacted in a given year
- ▲ Rhode Island General Laws & Rhode Island Constitution
- ▲ Senate & House Calendars
- ▲ Senate & House Journals
- ▲ Committee agendas, directories, and memberships
- ▲ Appropriation requests
- ▲ Press releases
- ▲ E-mail for Senators and Representatives
- ▲ Student/teacher guide
- ▲ State House virtual tour

In 2000, Legislative Data Systems added a “Bill Status/History” feature that allows internet users to track every action on legislation, from introduction to passage. For those without access to the Internet, bill-tracking information is still available by calling 401-222-3580 or by using the 1-800-547-8880 number from outside the Providence area.



THE RHODE ISLAND
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
&
HOW A BILL
BECOMES A LAW

www.rilin.state.ri.us



House Lounge

SENATE



Senate Chamber



House Chamber

HOUSE

Senator introduces a bill.

The President of the Senate assigns it to a committee or directs the Senate to give the bill immediate consideration, which means it is acted upon without being referred to a committee.

In committee, the bill may be:

- ▲ Scheduled for one or more public hearings
- ▲ Amended, or have no action taken
- ▲ Transferred to another committee
- ▲ Approved, with or without amendments, and reported out,
- ▲ Defeated, continued, or held for further study.

The approved bill goes to the Senate floor with a recommendation that it be passed as introduced or as amended.

The bill is placed on the calendar for debate and action.

If the bill is voted upon and is defeated, it dies.

If approved, it is sent to the House, where it is subject to the same procedure except it is not given another number.

If it is a House bill and is passed in concurrence, it is sent to the Governor. If a House bill is amended by the Senate, it must be returned to the House for its approval, and then sent to the Governor.



Entrance to Senate



GOVERNOR

In acting on a bill, the Governor may sign it into law or may veto the legislation. The governor can also allow a bill to become law without signing it. If the Governor vetoes a bill, it is returned to the chamber where it originated along with the reasons for the action. If both chambers approve the vetoed bill by a three-fifths margin on a roll-call vote, the measure becomes law. Failing that, the bill dies.

Representative introduces a bill. Speaker assigns it to a committee.

Or, if there is no objection from any member, the bill may be given immediate consideration and be acted upon without being referred to a committee.

In committee, the bill may be:

- ▲ Scheduled for one or more public hearings
- ▲ Amended, or have no action taken
- ▲ Transferred to another committee
- ▲ Approved, with or without amendments, and reported out
- ▲ Defeated, continued or held for further study
- ▲ Reported out to the House floor with a recommendation of "no passage"

Once a bill is reported out of committee, it is placed on the calendar for subsequent debate and a vote by the entire House membership. If the bill is voted upon and is defeated, it dies. If approved, the bill is sent to the Senate, where it is subject to a similar procedure, except it is not given another number. If it is a Senate bill and is passed in concurrence, it is sent to the Governor.



Entrance to House



Outside Senate Entrance

In order to respond to issues that come before legislators, the General Assembly has several agencies that provide administrative and technical assistance to its members.

JOINT COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE SERVICES, chaired by the Speaker of the House and composed of the President of the Senate, the Majority Leader of the House and the Minority Leaders of the House and Senate, is responsible for all administrative and personnel matters affecting the General Assembly.

OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL provides the General Assembly with legislative oversight capability. Often referred to as the legislature's fiscal watchdog, the Auditor General's staff audits the financial records and operations of state agencies. It reports its findings to the Joint Committee on Legislative Services.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL is the principal research and legal arm of the General Assembly. The council's staff of attorneys, researchers, secretaries and clerical aides provides legislators with information on matters pending before the legislature. The council's principal activity is the drafting of legislation for individual members.

LAW REVISION OFFICE resolves, corrects, and consolidates the **Public Laws and Acts & Resolves** passed by the General Assembly so that statutory language is updated, redundancies avoided, obsolete enactments eliminated and imperfections cured. Law Revision is responsible for both the printed versions of the **Public Laws, Acts & Resolves, and the Rhode Island General Laws** and for posting this information on the General Assembly's Web site.

CAPITOL TELEVISION provides gavel-to-gavel cable television coverage of all House and Senate session as well as meetings of some committees, such as the House Committee on Finance. The Capitol Television cablecasts can be seen on the Statewide Interconnect C channel, which is Channel 15 for both Cox Communications and Full Channel TV cable subscribers.

LEGISLATIVE PRESS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION BUREAU publicists assist legislators in dealing with the news media through press releases and press conferences. The bureau also prints and makes available to the public copies of all legislation introduced and considered in both chambers. The bureau provides legislators with copying services and also creates and prints topic related brochures and materials, commission reports and a wide variety of stationery items.