



American Society
of Echocardiography

Congress 101

ASE's Guide to U.S. Lawmaking

Why This Matters

Congress shapes the policies and funding that *directly affect how cardiovascular care is delivered, reimbursed, and prioritized* across the country.



Payment Policies

Congress oversees the current Medicare reimbursement structure for physician payment



Coverage Decisions

Whether a procedure, device, or diagnostic test is covered by Medicare or Medicaid depends on federal law.



Research Funding

NIH budgets, which fund cardiovascular research, are determined annually through appropriations.



Scope of Practice

Workforce and licensure policies that affect who can perform and interpret imaging are shaped by federal legislation.

U.S. Congress

The U.S. Congress has a **bicameral legislature** (two legislative chambers) made up of the **House of Representatives** (the “House”) and the **Senate**.

The two bodies work together to pass federal legislation but hold their own distinct structures, rules, and powers.



House of
Representatives

Senate

Both chambers have the power to:

- Make laws
- Approve the budget
- Override presidential vetoes
- Conduct investigations
- Declare war

U.S. Capital Building - Where Congress meets to write the laws of our nation



Congressional Structure and Leadership

The House of Representatives

435 members

Each seat represents a Congressional district
The number of seats are determined by state population, with at each state receiving a minimum of one representative

2-year terms

All House Members must run for reelection every 2 years

Unique powers to the House

Introduces revenue bills (tax laws)
Initiates impeachment



The Senate

100 members

Two seats per State

6-year terms

One third of Senate Members run for reelection every 2 years

Unique powers to the Senate

Confirms presidential appointments (cabinet members, federal judges, ambassadors)
Ratifies treaties
Conducts impeachment trials



Majority and Minority Leadership

The political party that holds the majority of the seats is named the **"majority"**

In the current 119th Congress, Republications have the majority in both the House and the Senate

The majority has the power to:



Set the legislative agenda and prioritize what bills get advanced, debated, and voted on



Determine leadership positions

House:

- 218 Republicans
- 214 Democrats
- 3* Vacancies

Senate:

- 53 Republicans
- 45 Democrats
- 2 Independents**

* As of 2/18/26

** Currently, the Independents caucus with the Democrats

House Leadership

Speaker of the House

The Speaker acts as the leader
of the House



Rep. Mike Johnson (R-LA)

Majority Leader

Represents Republicans on the
House floor



Rep. Steve Scalise (R-LA)

Minority Leader

Represents Democrats on
the House floor



Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY)

Senate Leadership

President of the Senate

Presiding officer of the Senate and tie breaker



Vice President J.D. Vance

Majority Leader

Represents Republicans on the Senate floor



Sen. John Thune (R-SD)

Minority Leader

Represents Democrats on the Senate floor



Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY)

President Pro Tempore

Serves as president of the Senate during the absence of the vice president



Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-IA)



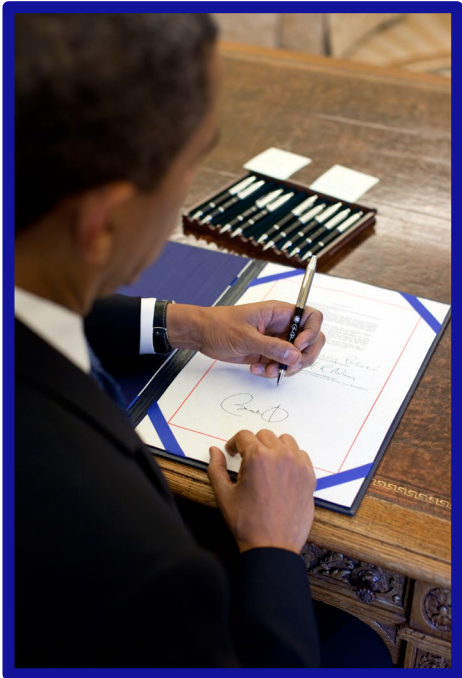
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Legislation and Committees

How Congress proposes, shapes, and funds policy

Bills and Resolutions

A bill, or legislation, is a **proposal for congressional action**. A bill is introduced in either the House or the Senate. There are four types of legislation:



Bills - Bills are the primary vehicle used for proposal of congressional action.



Simple Resolutions - This type of legislation is used for internal chamber affairs. Because they only impact one chamber, they do not require action by the other chamber.

(measure can not be made law)

(i.e. Committee assignments, express condolences, the quorum has been met)



Joint Resolution - This type of legislation has a similar method of passage as bills. It requires approval of both chambers and the signature of the President.

(i.e. constitutional amendments, appropriations, declarations of war)



Concurrent Resolution - This type of legislation addresses matters impacting both chambers. They are not submitted to the President for approval.

(measure can not be made law)

(i.e. Congress to count electoral votes)

Fewer than
10% of bills
introduced
become law

Bill Sponsorship and Cosponsorship

Sponsor

- The Representative or Senator who **introduces a bill or resolution**
- A bill can only have one sponsor, who is first named in the bill
- Sponsoring a bill signals strong personal commitment and ownership

Cosponsor

- A Representative or Senator who **formally supports a bill**
- No limit of the number of cosponsors a bill may have
- Members whose names are submitted with the bill at the time of introduction are referred to as “original cosponsors”
 - More cosponsors = stronger signal of congressional support and momentum
 - Bipartisan cosponsors signal the bill can attract votes from both parties

114TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 1703

To amend the Fair Credit Reporting Act to create protected credit reports for minors and protect the credit of minors, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 26, 2015

Mr. LANGEVIN (for himself, Mr. LYNCH, Ms. CLARK of Massachusetts, and Mr. CÁRDENAS) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Financial Services

A BILL

To amend the Fair Credit Reporting Act to create protected credit reports for minors and protect the credit of minors, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*

Congressional Committees: How Bills Are Shaped

Most legislative work happens not on the floor — but in committees.

Standing Committees

- **Permanent committees**
- Ongoing jurisdiction over specific policy areas (e.g., finance, health, armed services)
- Most bills are referred here first.

Subcommittees

- **Smaller working groups** within a standing committee
- Focus on specific topics
- Often conduct hearings and initial markups before the full committee

Select / Special Committees

- **Temporary committees created to investigate specific issues** or conduct special inquiries
- Do not have permanent legislative jurisdiction

Conference Committees

- **Temporary joint House-Senate panels** formed to resolve differences between House and Senate versions of the same bill before final passage

Standing Committees

A congressional committee is a group of members and staff who specialize in various subjects.

The House and Senate each have **20 standing committees**

Most committees break out into subcommittees of fewer members for further specialization

Roles of committees:



- Hold hearings and markups to examine, refine, and advance proposed legislation
- Conduct oversight of government agencies and programs within their jurisdictions

Authorization vs. Appropriation

Authorization vs. Appropriation

The federal legislative process separates policy and funding into two distinct steps

A health care metaphor: Authorization issues the prescription; appropriation fills it

 Authorization	Appropriation 
Legislation that creates or continues a federal program, agency, or activity	Legislation that provides actual funding for authorized programs and agencies
Sets the rules, scope, and policy framework for how a program operates	Must be passed annually as part of the federal budget process
Handled by committees of jurisdiction (e.g., Senate HELP, House Energy & Commerce)	Handled by the Appropriations Committees and their subcommittees
May include a funding ceiling but does not actually provide money	Failure to pass appropriations bills on time can lead to continuing resolutions or government shutdowns

What is a Committee of Jurisdiction?



Bill Introduced

A member introduces a bill in their chamber

Referred to Committee

The speaker of Senate presiding officer refers the bill to the appropriate committee based on its subject matter

Committee Takes Over

The committee of jurisdiction decides whether to hold hearings, mark up, or advance the bill – acting as the gatekeeper

Multiple Referrals

If a bill touches multiple policy areas, it can be referred to more than one committee – common in healthcare

Committees of Jurisdiction for Health Care

House of Representatives

Committee on Energy and Commerce



- Broad jurisdiction over public health, physicians, and consumer protection
- Oversees medical devices, pharmaceuticals, and health care delivery
- One of the oldest and most influential House committees

Committee on Ways and Means



- Jurisdiction over Medicare and related tax provisions
- Shares Medicaid jurisdiction with Energy & Commerce
- Controls revenue-related aspects of health care policy

Note: Jurisdiction between these two committees often overlaps — major health care bills are frequently referred to both

Senate

Committee on Finance



- Oversees Medicare, Medicaid, and CHIP funding and policy
- **Jurisdiction over tax-related health provisions** (e.g., ACA subsidies, HSAs, employer-sponsored insurance tax exclusion)
- One of the most powerful health care committees due to its spending authority

Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP Committee)



- **Handles public health, biomedical research, and the health care workforce**
- Oversees private health insurance regulations and drug pricing policy
- Authorizes (but does not fund) many major health programs

Note: The Finance Committee and HELP Committee often share jurisdiction

What is an Appropriations Committee?



Authorization sets policy — but *Appropriations Committees control the actual money.*



Annual Process

Appropriations bills must be passed every fiscal year (Oct 1 – Sept 30), making these committees consistently powerful.

LHHS Subcommittee

The key health care subcommittee in both chambers:

the Labor, HHS, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) Subcommittee funds nearly all major federal health agencies.

If Bills Don't Pass: Congress may pass a Continuing Resolution (CR) to keep funding at prior levels, or face a government shutdown halting non-essential federal activities.

Authorization
≠
Appropriation

A program can be authorized but receive no funding — or funded while its authorization has expired. These are entirely separate tracks.

Health Care Appropriations: The LHHS Subcommittees



Both chambers have a Labor, HHS, Education & Related Agencies Subcommittee – the main vehicle for funding federal health programs



House LHHS Subcommittee

All spending bills must originate in the House (U.S. Constitution, Article I)



Senate LHHS Subcommittee

Upper chamber; typically initiates compromise discussions with House

When House and Senate pass different funding bills, a conference resolves the differences into a final version that both chambers must vote on again.

Key Programs and Agencies: NIH, CDC, FDA, HRSE, CMS (admin funding)

Mandatory vs. Discretionary Spending

Not all federal spending goes through the appropriations process

Discretionary Spending	Mandatory Spending
Set each year through the appropriations process	Spending that happens automatically based on existing law
Congress must actively pass a spending bill or CR each year	NOT subject to the annual appropriations process
Controlled by the Appropriations Committees	Changes require new legislation — not just an appropriations bill
Examples: NIH research budgets, CDC public health programs, FDA operations	Controlled by Finance and Ways & Means Committees
Advocates can influence these levels year over year	Examples: Medicare, Medicaid, CHIP

Key Takeaway: Cuts or increases to Medicare and Medicaid require legislative changes through the committees of jurisdiction — not the appropriations process.

How a Bill Becomes a Law

How a Bill Becomes a Law



Drafted and Introduced

A member drafts a bill and formally introduces it. Any member can introduce a bill in their chamber. This is where ASE can help shape the text.



Referred to Committee

The bill is sent to the relevant committee of jurisdiction. The committee chair decides whether it advances at all.



Hearings & Markups

The committee holds hearings to gather expert input, then marks up the bill before voting to advance it.



Floor Vote

If reported out of committee, the bill goes to the full chamber floor for debate and a vote. Both chambers must pass the same text.



Conference & Reconciliation

If the House and Senate pass different versions, a conference committee reconciles differences.



Presidential Action

The President signs the bill into law or vetoes it. A vetoed bill can become law if 2/3 of both chambers override the veto.

Step 1 & 2: Drafted, Introduced & Referred to Committee



Drafted and Introduced

- ▶ Any member of Congress can introduce a bill in their chamber
- ▶ Bill text is often drafted with input from stakeholders, advocacy groups, and staff — this is where ASE's voice matters most
- ▶ Upon introduction, the bill receives a number (H.R. ___ or S. ___)
- ▶ Bills can be introduced in either chamber simultaneously for parallel action
- ▶ A member's decision to introduce a bill signals their commitment to the issue

ASE Opportunity:

Help draft bill language, identify a congressional champion, and recruit original cosponsors at introduction.



Referred to Committee

- ▶ The Speaker (House) or presiding officer (Senate) refers the bill to the appropriate committee(s) of jurisdiction
- ▶ The committee chair then decides whether to schedule hearings — most bills die here without action
- ▶ Bills can be referred to multiple committees if they touch more than one jurisdiction
- ▶ Engaging the committee chair and ranking member is critical at this stage
- ▶ Advocates can request a hearing or markup to build momentum

ASE Opportunity:

Engage committee staff and members directly, request a hearing, and demonstrate broad stakeholder support.

Step 3 & 4: Committee Hearings, Markup & Floor Vote



Hearings & Markups

- ▶ Hearings: Committee invites experts, advocates, and affected parties to testify — this is a key opportunity to put ASE's voice on the record
- ▶ Markup: The committee goes through the bill line-by-line, offering and voting on amendments
- ▶ If the bill passes out of committee ("reported out"), it moves to the floor
- ▶ Bills that don't receive a hearing or markup effectively stall and die in committee

ASE Opportunity:
Submit testimony, request to testify, and engage committee members on specific amendments.



Floor Vote

- ▶ In the House: Rules Committee sets the terms for debate (time limits, amendment rules) — a major gatekeeper
- ▶ In the Senate: More open process; any senator can offer amendments or use procedural tools to delay
- ▶ Both chambers must pass the exact same text for the bill to advance to the President
- ▶ A vote on final passage is a critical moment — member positions are recorded

ASE Opportunity:
Request floor votes, urge members to vote 'yes' or 'no', and mobilize member grassroots outreach.

Step 5 & 6: Conference, Presidential Action & Implementation



Conference & Reconciliation

- ▶ If the House and Senate pass different versions, a conference committee of members from both chambers resolves differences
- ▶ The resulting conference report must be voted on again by both chambers — no further amendments allowed
- ▶ Alternatively, one chamber may simply adopt the other's text ("ping-pong") to avoid conference
- ▶ This stage can significantly alter bill content — advocates should stay engaged

ASE Opportunity:
Monitor conference negotiations closely and weigh in on provisions that affect imaging and cardiology.



Presidential Action

- ▶ The President has 10 days to sign or veto the bill once it passes both chambers
- ▶ If signed, it becomes Public Law — but the work doesn't stop there
- ▶ Federal agencies (CMS, FDA, etc.) must then implement the law through regulations and rulemaking
- ▶ The rulemaking process — including public comment periods — is another critical advocacy opportunity

ASE Opportunity:
Engage CMS and FDA during rulemaking; submit comments during public comment periods.



Next Step: Where Advocates Fit in

Check out the [ASE Advocacy Toolkit](#) for additional resources:

- Learn more on ASE's legislative priorities
- Sign up for ASE advocacy alerts
- Reach out to your Member of Congress

