

Quick Guide: Understanding the Language of Bills

Legislative language can be confusing! Here's how to decode key terms and phrases you'll often see:

Term	Meaning	Example / Tip
Bill Number	A unique ID for each proposed law.	<i>House Bill 123 (HB 123)</i> means it started in the House. <i>Senate Bill 45 (SB 45)</i> started in the Senate.
Sponsor / Co-sponsor	The legislator(s) who introduced or supported the bill.	"Sponsored by Rep. John Smith and Sen. Mary Jones."
Amendment	A change or addition proposed to a bill.	"An amendment was added to include funding for rural schools."
Committee	A small group of legislators that reviews bills before they go to a full vote.	"The bill is in the Education Committee."
Hearing	A meeting where the public and experts share testimony.	You can attend or submit written testimony here!
Fiscal Note	A summary of the bill's financial impact.	"The fiscal note shows no cost to the state budget."
Engrossed / Enrolled	"Engrossed" = amended version; "Enrolled" = final version before it becomes law.	Think of "enrolled" as ready for signature.
Effective Date	When will the law start if passed?	"This act takes effect July 1, 2026."
Repeal	To remove an existing law.	"Repeals section 5-2-101 of the Montana Code."
Shall / May	"Shall" = required action; "May" = optional or permitted.	"The department shall provide" means they must.

Quick Tip: If a bill seems complicated, read the **summary** and **fiscal note** first. Those explain what the bill does without legal jargon.