

THE 2026 LEGISLATURE

The South Dakota Legislature is established by Article III of the Constitution of South Dakota as a bicameral legislative body.

SESSIONS

Legislative Sessions can run for up to 40 days every year, depending on the legislative calendar set by the Legislature.

The 2026 Legislative Session will begin Tuesday, January 13, 2026, and ends Monday, March 30, 2026, to complete a 38-day session. During the Session, the Legislature will be in recess beginning Friday, March 13, through Friday, March 27.

Special Sessions: May be called by the Governor or two-thirds of both houses of the Legislature.

MEMBERSHIP

Term of Office: Two Years.

Term Limit: Four Consecutive Terms.

Elected: November of even-numbered years.

The **Senate** consists of 35 Senators (32 R, 3 D) representing 35 districts. The Constitution provides for not fewer than 25 or more than 35 members.

The **House** consists of 70 Representatives (65 R, 5 D) representing 35 districts. The Constitution provides for not fewer than 50 or more than 75 members. Districts 26 and 28 have been subdivided into two House districts to ensure compliance with the Voting Rights Act.

STANDING COMMITTEES

COMMITTEE	Senate Chair	House Chair
Agriculture & Natural Resources	Tom Pischke	Marty Overweg
Appropriations	Ernie Otten	Mike Derby
Commerce & Energy	Casey Crabtree	Karla Lems
Education	Kyle Schoenfish	Lana Greenfield
Government Operations & Audit	Taffy Howard	Marty Overweg
Health & Human Services	Kevin Jensen	Brian Mulder
Judiciary	Steve Kolbeck	Mike Stevens
Legislative Procedure	Chris Karr	Jon Hansen
Local Government	Tim Reed	Greg Jamison
Military & Veterans Affairs	Larry Zikmund	Tim Goodwin
Retirement Laws	Randy Deibert	Mike Weisgram
State Affairs	Jim Mehlhaff	Scott Odenbach
Taxation	Sue Peterson	Aaron Aylward
Transportation	Randy Deibert	Tony Randolph

HOW AN IDEA BECOMES LAW



A bill is simply an idea that someone would like to see become law. It could be anything from the penalty for committing a crime to the amount of money that can be spent on a state program.

The idea can come from anyone, but only a Representative or Senator can take that idea and guide it to final passage through the State Legislature.



Drafting a bill means putting the idea into legal language.

The drafting is done by the Legislative Research Council, the permanent, non-partisan staff of the Legislature.

Introduction of a bill can be made by any member of the House or Senate, and more than one legislator generally sponsors a bill. The legislator whose name appears first on the bill is the "prime sponsor."



The Bill is introduced in the House or Senate.

If the bill is sponsored by a Senator, it is a Senate Bill. If the bill is sponsored by a Representative, it is a House Bill. A legislator who sponsors the bill presents it for introduction.



The bill is given a First Reading in the "House of Origin." The "House of Origin" is the chamber that sponsored the bill. A First Reading means the bill's number and title are read aloud.



The Committee Process.

The Senate President Pro Tempore or Speaker of the House then assigns the bill to a committee.

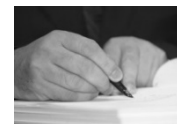
Committee action is crucial to the legislative process. A committee's responsibility is to examine a bill carefully, hear testimony for and against the bill, and decide whether to send the bill to the "floor" (the full House or Senate) for consideration by the appropriate chamber.



The Committee's Options.

The committee can send the bill to the floor with a "Do Pass" recommendation. They can "Table" the bill, which means it is dead unless the full body orders the committee to send the bill to the floor ("Smoke-Out"). Or, the committee may defer a bill to the 41st day, which also kills the bill since there cannot be more than 40 legislative days. In rare cases, if a committee cannot get enough votes to pass or kill the bill, a measure may be sent to the floor without recommendation. In that case, the full body of that chamber must vote whether they want to place the bill on the "calendar" (agenda) for consideration.

Once a bill reaches the floor, it is debated and voted on. If it passes, the bill is forwarded on to the other body, where it goes through the same committee process.



If a bill passes both the House and Senate, it is sent to the Governor.

If signed, the bill becomes law. If vetoed, the Legislature has an opportunity to decide whether to override or uphold the veto. If the Legislature succeeds in overriding the veto, the bill becomes law.

SENATE

HOUSE

OFFICERS

President:

Tonnies H. Venhuizen (R)

By virtue of the office as Lieutenant Governor, presides over Senate.

President Pro Tempore:

Chris Karr (R)

Elected by Senate; presides over Senate in absence of the President. Appoints Senate Chairs and committee members; refers bills to appropriate committees.

Speaker:

Jon Hansen (R)

Elected by House of Representatives; presides over House; appoints House Chairs and members of committees; refers bills to appropriate committees.

Speaker Pro Tempore:

Karla Lems (R)

Elected by House of Representatives; presides over House in absence of the Speaker.

MAJORITY AND MINORITY LEADERS

Preside over party caucuses. The leaders are elected by their respective caucus membership.

Majority Leader:

Jim Mehlhaff (R)

Assistant Majority Leader:

Carl Perry (R)

Majority Whips:

Randy Deibert (R)

Kevin Jensen (R)

Sue Peterson (R)

Tom Pischke (R)

Minority Leader:

Liz Larson (D)

Assistant Minority Leader:

Jamie Smith (D)

Minority Whips:

Majority Leader:

Scott Odenbach (R)

Assistant Majority Leader:

Marty Overweg (R)

Majority Whips:

Jessica Bahmuller (R)

Les Heinemann (R)

Greg Jamison (R)

Brandei Schaeffbauer (R)

Bethany Soye (R)

Minority Leader:

Erin Healy (D)

Assistant Minority Leader:

Eric Emery (D)

Minority Whips:

Kadyn Wittman (D)

Nicole Uhre-Balk (D)

EMPLOYEES

Responsible for the administrative details of the two chambers and calling the roll for votes.

Secretary:

Peggy Laurenz

Chief Clerk:

Patricia Miller

LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH COUNCIL

Provides research services, drafts legislation, provides legal and fiscal analysis, staffs committee meetings, maintains the Legislature's official journals and the legislative website, and provides technical assistance for the recording and broadcasting of committee meetings and floor sessions during the legislative session.

Director:

John McCullough

2026 LEGISLATIVE TIMETABLE

January 13	First day of Session.
February 4	Last day to introduce individual bills and joint resolutions.
February 5	Last day to introduce committee bills and joint resolutions.
February 23	Last day to use J.R. 5-17.
February 23	Last day for required delivery of bills or resolutions by a committee in house of origin.
February 24	Last day for a bill or joint resolution to pass the house of origin.
March 5	Last day for required delivery of bills or resolutions by a committee in second house.
March 9	Last day for a bill or joint resolution to pass both houses.
March 12	37 th Legislative Day.
March 30	38 th Legislative Day.
July 1	Effective date of enacted legislation (except emergency measures).

Legislative Meetings: [Legislative Calendar](#)

VISITOR INFORMATION

Legislative sessions and committee hearings are held in the Capitol at Pierre and are open to the public.

Committee hearings are conducted in the morning of each legislative day. Notice of time and location of each hearing is posted on the LRC website and in front of each chamber on the third floor.

Legislative session convenes daily 2:00 p.m. (CT) unless otherwise ordered by the body. The public galleries are located on the fourth floor. Additionally, live audio webcasts of all committee meetings and floor sessions can be heard by accessing the Legislature's website and clicking on the committee or chamber you wish to monitor.

TELEPHONE DIRECTORY

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Legislative Session Information

2026

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