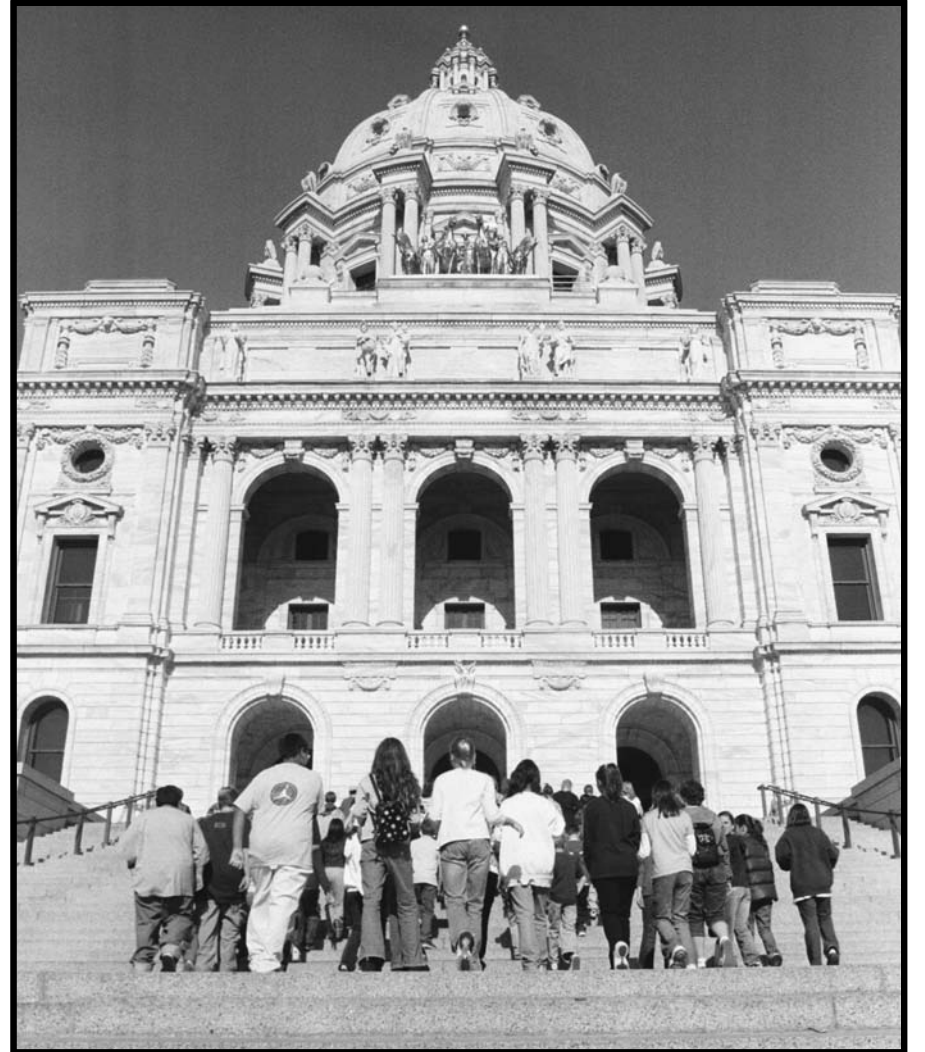


# CAPITOL STEPS

How Six Bills Became Law



MINNESOTA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

175 STATE OFFICE BUILDING  
100 CONSTITUTION AVENUE  
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**Capitol Steps**  
**How Six Bills Became Law**

Produced by  
Minnesota House of Representatives  
Public Information Services

Special thanks to the House Research Department and Chief Clerk's Office.

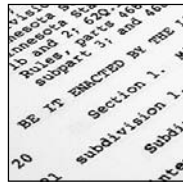
# Contents



6. If both the House and Senate pass the bill, and if the bill is exactly the same in both bodies, it is then sent to the governor for his or her signature or veto. But if the bills are different, a conference committee is appointed.



7. Conference committees are appointed to work out differences between the House and Senate versions of a bill. Typically, either three or five members from each body are named to such committees.



8. Once the conference committee reaches a compromise, the bill is sent back to the House and Senate for their approval. No amendments are allowed to a conference committee report.



9. The bill is then sent to the governor for approval or disapproval. If he or she vetoes it, the bill can't become law unless two-thirds of the members in both the House and the Senate vote to override the veto and approve the bill. If the governor signs the bill, it becomes law.



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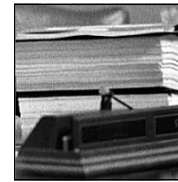


## How a bill becomes law in Minnesota

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The statistical information used in this publication was drawn from the following sources: the Minnesota Hospital and Healthcare Partnership, the Department of Human Services, Hamline University's A Thousand Friends of Frogs, the Department of Public Safety, and the House Information Office.

# How a bill becomes law in Minnesota



1. A bill for a proposed new law is introduced in the full House or full Senate. The idea for a new law can come from anybody — a legislator, an interest group, or an average citizen.



2. The bill is referred to a committee based on the subject area it covers. A bill about farming, for example, would be sent to the Agriculture Policy Committee. A bill about altering the sales tax would be referred to the Taxes Committee.



3. The bill is considered by one committee, or several committees, before being sent to the House or Senate floor. A bill pertaining to pesticides used in farming, for example, could be sent to the Environment and Natural Resources Policy Committee for further discussion.



4. The bill is discussed in committee by members, who listen to public testimony, and then it is either approved, defeated, amended and then approved, or debate is postponed. If the bill is approved, it is sent either to the full House or Senate or to another committee for discussion.



5. The first time a bill comes up for a vote on the House or Senate floor, amendments can be added to it. The House and Senate will then debate the bill and vote on it.

# Capitol Steps

## An introduction



part of the House omnibus bill for the criminal justice system. That bill, sponsored by Representative Sherry Broecker, had to go through the introduction and reading process all over again.

The Senate's version of the omnibus bill was sponsored by Senator Kelly, and it included the police pursuit training requirements.

The House omnibus bill eventually passed the full House on a 119-13 vote. The Senate passed the omnibus bill on a 62-2 vote, but the Senate's version was different.

Because the House and Senate versions of the bill were not exactly the same, it was sent to a conference committee. The job of a conference committee is to find a compromise so the House and Senate can vote on exactly the same thing.

A conference committee includes three to five representatives and the same number of senators. The bigger the bill, the more people on the conference committee.

Five representatives and five

senators were named to the conference committee on the omnibus bill. They met and agreed on a compromise. The bill was then re-passed by the House and Senate.

Governor Jesse Ventura signed it into law on May 25, 1999.

As of July 1, 1999, all new police officers receive pursuit training before they can go out on the streets, and all officers must go through the training every three years.

Law enforcement agencies can use special, computer-controlled machines to help train officers. The machines are sort of like video games. They simulate the conditions officers would face in a chase situation. The simulators allow them to practice without the danger.

Also, the law requires each police and sheriff's department to have a written policy about how officers should handle emergency situations on the road. That way everyone knows what he or she should do in every situation.

Minnesota lawmakers follow a step-by-step process. The process begins with an idea. That idea becomes a bill. And after climbing step after step, that bill becomes a law.

For about 100 years, the Minnesota State Capitol has stood on a hill above St. Paul, overlooking the city below on the banks of the Mississippi River.

Most everybody knows what the building looks like. It has a giant white dome and a huge statue of golden horses atop the roof. There is no other structure like it in Minnesota.

There's also nothing else like what goes on inside. If you ever get the chance to visit the Capitol, watch and listen closely. You may see the governor walk past. You may hear the echoes of legislators debating, school-children laughing, and protesters hollering.

The governor's office is located in the Capitol, and the Minnesota Supreme Court chamber is there. But the center of attention in the building is the Legislature.

The Minnesota Legislature is made up of the House of Representatives and the Senate. The 134 representatives and 67 senators gather for several months every year to make decisions on issues that are important to you and your family.

## Facts



**201**  
Total number of seats in the Minnesota Legislature



**134**  
Number of members in the House of Representatives



**67**  
Number of members in the Senate

If you think those issues won't be of interest until you're older, think again. Over the years, young people have helped to shape the laws of our state and have pushed the Legislature to make changes.

Consider the story of some junior high school students from Henderson, Minnesota. A few years back, they were working on a class project near the Minnesota River when they found frogs with deformed bodies.

The students decided something needed to be done. They came to the Capitol to convince the Minnesota Legislature to pay for studies to find out what caused the frogs to become deformed.

During every legislative session, the problems and concerns of ordinary people are transformed into law in Minnesota. If enough people complain about a problem, legislators will take action to change the situation.

Representatives and senators discuss ideas for new laws and changes for old ones. These people rely on the opinions of people like you, your family, and your friends to guide them along the way.

Our government was founded on the idea that anyone can make a difference. Every legislator is an ordinary citizen, just like you and your neighbors.

To become a legislator, a person must be an eligible voter who is at least 21 years old. A person also must have lived in Minnesota for at least one year, with at least six months in the district he or she wishes to serve. Senators serve a term of four years; representatives serve a term of two years.

All it takes is a majority of votes in the district to get elected. Each House district includes about 33,000 people. Each Senate district is twice as large.

The Legislature includes men and women of many ages, races, and religions. No matter who they are or where they live, all Minnesotans have someone working for them at the Capitol.

What can you do to make a difference? Let's look at an example of young people in action to show how an idea grows into a law.

In 1988, a group of third-grade students from South Terrace Elementary School in Carlton, Minnesota, convinced the Legislature that Minnesota

Representative Stanek also needed to find someone who would sponsor the bill in the Senate. Senator Randy Kelly of St. Paul liked the idea and decided to sponsor the bill.

In the House, the bill was sent to the House Crime Prevention Committee. Representative Stanek is the chair of that committee, which means he decides which bills the committee members will discuss during their meetings.

Committees hear testimony from experts and citizens. Then the members take a vote to send the bill out of the committee. If the committee approves the bill, then it is reported to the full House or Senate with the committee's recommendation that it be passed.

The family of Steven Winkel, one of the men killed in the accident on Thanksgiving Day, testified before Representative Stanek's committee. They said they supported the bill because the training would help officers think about the consequences of chasing a suspect's car at high speeds.

"The result of this officer's decision cost us our son's life and the life of his best friend," said Jim Winkel, Steve's father.

Though the Winkel family supported Representative Stanek's

efforts, the representative said he did not want to use their tragedy to make sure his bill passed.

"I did not put them in the spotlight," Representative Stanek said. "In the interest of public policy, we needed different voices of the people out in the public."

Since there were several cases where police chases resulted in serious injuries or deaths, the issue was already in the public spotlight.

The Crime Prevention Committee approved the bill. However, because it included money to help communities pay for the training, it needed to go through a finance committee.

When a bill includes funding, it usually waits for members of the finance committee to decide if it should be included in an "omnibus bill."

**If a committee approves a bill, the proposal is reported to the full House or Senate with the committee's recommendation that it be passed.**

Omnibus is a Latin word meaning "for all." So an omnibus bill includes all the spending items necessary for a particular part of state government. The Legislature considers omnibus bills for topics such as the criminal justice system, education, agriculture, and the environment.

Representative Stanek's bill became

## Terms



### Bill

Written proposal calling for a new law or a change in existing law.

### Sponsor

Person who introduces a bill and guides it through the legislative process. Sometimes called the bill author.

### Introduction

Formal presentation of a bill to a body of the Legislature. The bill gets its first reading at this time and is then sent to a committee.

20 Bill including police training plan passes House  
23 Senate conference committee members appointed

26 House conference committee members appointed

### May 1999

15 Compromise bill passes House and Senate  
25 Governor Ventura signs bill

### July 1999

1 New law takes effect

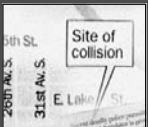
## Facts



**921**  
Number of police chases in Minnesota during 1998



**6**  
Number of people killed in chase-related accidents in 1998



**42**  
Percent of pursuits that ended in damage to squad cars or other property in 1998

Stanek's bill passed the Legislature in 1999. Officers now must receive training to learn how to drive safely in extreme situations.

Representative Stanek, who is from Maple Grove, had been working on the plan for some time before the 1999 Legislative Session. But that year police pursuits became a subject of controversy after four people were killed when they were caught in the wrong place at the wrong time.

In August 1998, police chased a man who was driving erratically on the freeway near downtown Minneapolis. The man did not stop or even slow down during the pursuit. Tragically, the man's van smashed into two cars parked on the side of the road.

One of those cars belonged to a woman who had run out of gas, and the other belonged to a friend who had come to help out. Both women were killed in the crash.

Then on the evening of Thanksgiving that same year, two young men were driving to a fast-food restaurant when their vehicle was hit by a Minneapolis police car.

Both men died.

The police had been chasing suspects in a burglary. The squad car did not have its lights or siren on.

"I was concerned because I'm a cop," said Representative Stanek, who is a captain with the Minneapolis police. "You have to think twice before you get into a pursuit."

While working on his bill, Representative Stanek met with several citizen groups and police organizations to see what they thought would be the best solution to the problem.

He thought officers might resist more training requirements, because they already spend so much time learning to become police officers. But, Representative Stanek said, he didn't have any trouble convincing them that training would be a good idea.

Then it was time to introduce the bill in the Legislature.

The first step for Representative Stanek was to officially present the bill to the members of the House in what is called introduction and first reading. A bill must receive three official readings in front of the entire House before it can be passed.

needed a state muffin.

Naming an official state muffin might seem like an easy task. Minnesota wasn't the first state to name one. Two other states have official muffins. Massachusetts has the corn muffin, and New York has the apple muffin.

**The legislator who comes up with the bill is called the sponsor or author. Each bill has a sponsor in the Senate and a sponsor in the House.**

Still, those third-grade students met some opposition during their quest.

Some people said it was ridiculous to name a state muffin. Some said we couldn't claim blueberry muffins as our own because blueberry muffins aren't found only in Minnesota. In fact, people here may not bake or eat any more blueberry muffins than they do in other states across the country.

But the students believed that if Minnesota were to have a state food, it should be the blueberry muffin. They reasoned that wild blueberries are plentiful in northern Minnesota and farmers from across the state produce the other ingredients needed to make the muffins.

The students found a House member who agreed with their idea. The representative guided the state muffin plan until it passed the House.

It was difficult to get the Senate to go along with the plan, but the students were determined. The Senate eventually passed the muffin plan, and the governor signed the bill.

They encountered a few setbacks along the way, but the students saw their idea became law.

Though it may not have been as complicated or important as some of the other 314 bills passed that year, it proved that everybody — no matter how

old they are or where they live — can make a difference at the Legislature.

All they have to do is try.

A bill goes through many steps before becoming a law. Many bills stall somewhere in the process. For example, 250 bills were passed by the 1999 Legislature, but there were more than 4,500 bills introduced that year in the House and Senate combined.

First the idea for a bill must be put into writing. The legislator who comes up with the bill is called the sponsor or author. Each bill has a Senate sponsor and a House sponsor.

The bill is then introduced, or presented, to the House or the Senate, usually both.

After that, the House assigns the bill to one of its committees for

## Timeline

### January 1999

28 Original House bill introduced

### February 1999

15 Original Senate bill introduced  
25 House Crime Prevention Committee approves bill

### April 1999

15 Senate Human Resources Finance Committee approves bill  
19 Bill including police training plan passes Senate

### Committee

Group of legislators formed to study one specific area of law, such as education or the environment.

### Amendment

A proposal to make a change to a bill.

### Floor

A committee can send a bill to the "floor" in the House or Senate, meaning the bill awaits debate by all members of that body.

discussion. The Senate does the same.

Legislators each serve on three or four different committees. Every committee specializes in a certain area such as agriculture, education, environment, health, or transportation.

For example, the House K-12 Education Finance Committee studies education issues and the funding needs of schools all around the state. The



House Chamber

House Transportation Policy Committee looks at issues such as speed limits and other road rules.

Legislators discuss the bill in committee meetings and then recommend some action to the rest of the House or Senate. The recommendation might be to pass a bill, to pass it with certain changes, or to defeat it.

If the bill involves several different areas, for example agriculture and the environment, legislators might recommend that it be sent to another committee for further review.

From there, the bill goes to the floors of the House and Senate. There, all representatives and senators have a chance to vote on it.

To pass a bill in the House, you need 68 votes, or one over half of the House membership. To pass a bill in the Senate, you need 34 votes, just over half of the Senate membership.

If both houses agree on the bill, then it goes to the governor, who can approve or reject it.

But if the House and Senate bills are different, a “conference committee” is formed to work out the differences. A conference committee includes a few members from the House and a few from the Senate. They get together and try to find a compromise.

Once that is done, both the House and the Senate must approve the bill again. Then the bill is ready to go to the governor.

This book contains stories of how six bills became Minnesota law by traveling through the process at the Capitol. Some went through easily, and a few



Senate Chamber

tripped along the way. But ultimately they all made it to the top and reached the goal of becoming a law.

And they all became laws because people believed in them.

# Danger on the roads

## Police get training for high-speed chases

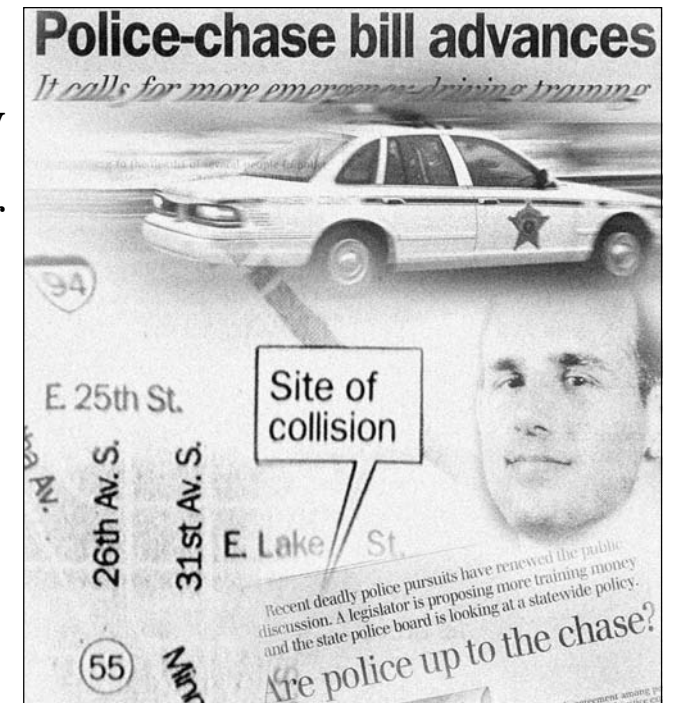
The Legislature passed a law to protect all drivers by making sure the police are trained for emergencies on the streets.

If you’ve ever been in a traffic accident, you know it can be a scary experience.

Your parents buy cars equipped with all kinds of special gadgets to keep you and your family safe. And it seems the first thing you do automatically when you get into the car is buckle the seat belt, just in case you need it.

Safety is especially important for police officers who are responding to traffic accidents or other emergency situations. They are often forced to travel at high speeds. And in the winter months, when ice and snow are simply a fact of life in Minnesota, the risks on the road become even greater.

When a person turns 15, he or she can complete driver’s education and take a test for a learner’s permit.



Only then, after training and practice, is a person eligible to take the driver’s license test at age 16.

But new drivers aren’t the only ones who need training.

Police officers, who often drive at high speeds in emergency situations, need training and practice for the special kind of driving they do.

Never before had officers been required to practice for high-speed chases or other emergencies. That changed when Representative Rich

The House and Senate don't always agree on the amount of money a particular project or bill should receive. When this happens, the solution involves a conference committee where the two sides must reach a compromise before the bill can be sent to the governor.

A conference committee is always made up of members of the House and members of the Senate. There are always an equal number of people from the House and Senate on each conference committee.

Upon comparison, there were several differences between the two bills. While the House had approved \$201,000, the Senate had set the funding for frog research and monitoring at \$123,000. A conference committee of five representatives and five senators had to meet several times to reach a compromise, and the final sum for frog research was set at \$151,000.

The Senate gave the bill final passage March 21, 1996, by a vote of 54-5. The House passed the bill five days later on a 126-5 vote.

Governor Arne Carlson signed the bill on April 2, 1996, and the new law took effect July 1 of that year.

The effort that the students started back in 1996 resulted in continued frog research in the following years.

Between 1996 and 2000, Minnesota spent over \$1 million to research the cause of frog deformities.

Statewide research has been carried out in conjunction with several partners, including the Pollution Control Agency, the University of Minnesota, Hamline University, the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, and the National Wildlife Health Center.

Unfortunately, the problem is not confined to Minnesota's borders. There have been reports of frog deformities in several other states, as well as Canada and Japan.

But the students in Henderson drew attention to the problem and prompted the government to start trying to find a solution.

The passage of this law is just one example of how the Legislature responds to the requests and needs of the state's people.

Researchers speculate that groundwater contamination, parasites, or possibly ultraviolet radiation may be behind the deformities. But not everyone agrees on what caused the deformities, and the research continues.

# Bringing home baby

## Law assures mothers and newborns two nights of care

Things happen faster and faster these days. But that's not always a good thing. Some people believed mothers and their newborn babies were being sent home from the hospital too soon. And those people did something about it.

A baby boy named Simon was born one day in the spring of 1995. The next day, Simon and his mother, Pamela, were released from the hospital.

Everything seemed normal, but that did not last. Less than a day later, Simon was taken to the emergency room. The baby had to be treated for dehydration and jaundice.

Fortunately, Simon recovered after receiving care from his doctors.

But the boy's parents believed that he wouldn't have gotten so ill if he had not been sent home so soon after he was born. They thought the



newborn and his mother should have been allowed to stay in the hospital for at least another day.

They also knew about other families who felt the same way. In fact, lots of people were complaining that mothers and newborn babies were being sent home too soon.

## Facts



**6 in 100**  
Cases in which newborns were discharged after only one day in a Minnesota hospital in 1985



**43 in 100**  
Cases in which newborns went home after one day in that hospital in 1995



**63,259**  
Number of births in Minnesota during 1995

Simon's father was in a position to do something about it. His name is Joe Opatz, a member of the Minnesota House of Representatives from St. Cloud.

**M**ost people pay for something called medical insurance. The insurance company then pays the bill when the person has to go to the doctor. Insurance companies pay for each night someone stays in the hospital. The longer the stay, the bigger the bill.

It used to be that mothers and newborns would always stay in the hospital for several days and sometimes for more than a week. But the world of health care has changed.

Advances in technology and treatment have helped reduce the need for long hospital stays. Surgeries that were once considered serious now seem routine. Patients regularly go home just hours after minor surgery.

Medical advances have also reduced the need for long hospital stays after birth.

At the same time, hospital care has become more expensive over the years, and insurance companies generally

do not pay for people to stay in the hospital longer than the companies think is necessary.

But back in 1996, many people believed things had gone too far.

**R**epresentative Opatz thought it would be a good idea to require insurance companies to pay for at least two days in the hospital for mothers and newborns.

Representative Opatz decided to "sponsor" a bill to do so. A sponsor, or author, is a legislator who will argue for a bill as it goes through the legislative process. A sponsor puts his or her name at the top of a bill, just as a student puts his or her name at the top of a school assignment.

In the House, Representative Opatz was the sponsor of the bill. Senator Don Betzold of Fridley was the bill sponsor in the Senate.

Two sponsors were needed because Minnesota has a two-house Legislature. All but one of the 50 states use the two-house system. The idea behind the two-house system is to make sure bills are studied very carefully from as many different angles as possible.

about this is that the problem was discovered by kids," observed Representative Virgil Johnson of Caledonia, after hearing the students' testimony. "I think it's a very important cause."

Representative Johnson successfully added a \$28,000 amendment for Hamline University in St. Paul to launch a program called "A Thousand Friends of Frogs," a network of students, teachers, and citizens to survey and report upon frogs across the state.

The bill, which now asked for \$78,000 for frog studies, then was referred to the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance Committee, which had 14 members.

Throughout the legislative session, the finance committee considers many bills requesting money for programs related to the environment and natural resources. That includes money to pay rangers at state parks, to clean up pollution, and to do a wide variety of other things. Final approval on funding requests is often delayed until all such bills have been heard by the committee.

After they determine how much money they have to spend, committee members decide which proposals are the most important and package them together. The process is similar in the Senate.

**A**s the House developed its environmental spending bill, the amount dedicated to frog research and public outreach grew to \$201,000.

Some members of the Environment and Natural Resources Finance Committee questioned why the original sum wasn't enough.

Pollution Control Agency officials explained that \$50,000 would cover only a small study. The additional money was needed to study locations that had been reported after the Minnesota River Valley discovery and media coverage of the problem.

Representative Munger stressed the link between frogs, the environment, and humans.

**After a bill passes through the committee process, it is sent to the "floor." That means the bill is placed on a list of bills awaiting debate by all House or Senate members.**

"We had better find out what's causing this environmental degradation," he once said. "Or else we're next."

After a brief stop in the 20-member House Ways and Means Committee, the environment finance plan passed the House March 6, 1996. The Senate had passed its version of the bill a week earlier.

## Timeline

### January 1996

16 House and Senate bills introduced  
22 House Health and Human Services Committee approves bill

29 House Financial Institutions and Insurance Committee approves bill

### February 1996

1 House passes bill  
19 Senate Health Care Committee approves bill  
26 Senate passes bill

### March 1996

26 Frog study bill approved by Senate Finance Committee  
28 Senate passes bill

6 House passes frog study bill  
21 Senate accepts compromise on bill

26 House accepts compromise on bill

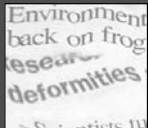
### April 1996

2 Governor signs frog bill into law  
3 New law takes effect

## Facts



**190 million**  
Number of years since the earliest known frog appeared on earth



**17.5**  
Number of feet in the longest leap by a frog ever recorded



**2 to 3 1/2**  
Number of inches in the average length of the northern leopard frog, a species found in every Minnesota county

state government that examines environmental problems and enforces environmental laws.

The students learned that frogs can easily absorb pollutants through their skin. Since frogs hatch in wetlands, eat on land, and hibernate in lakes and rivers, deformed frogs can alert scientists to problems in several different parts of the environment.

Scientists at the Pollution Control Agency had begun a small investigation of deformed frogs found near Granite Falls in 1993.

After the Henderson students' discovery made news in 1995, there were similar reports of abnormal frogs from across the state.

In order to expand its study, the agency needed to ask the 1996 Legislature for more money.

The agency found a supporter in Representative Willard Munger of Duluth, who introduced a bill requesting \$50,000 in funding for frog research.

"The frogs are the most sensitive creatures in our environment," Representative

Munger said. "I think they are telling us a story."

Senator Steven Morse of Dakota introduced a similar bill in the Senate.

Within a few short months of their discovery, the Henderson students exchanged their frog-picking outfits for more formal attire when they were called to St. Paul to testify in support of the proposals.

Testifying in front of a committee is a very easy process. As you've already learned, each committee focuses on a different part of state law. If you hear of a bill that you have an opinion about and you want to make your opinion known, find out when the committee is meeting and ask if you can testify. That's all there is to it.

Anyone can testify at a committee hearing, and all hearings are open to the public.

Armed with photographs of the strangely deformed frogs they had found in the Minnesota River Valley, the students explained the importance of frog research and monitoring to the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee, which was made up of 24 members.

"The really interesting thing

To become law, a bill must be approved by a majority of members in the House and a majority of members in the Senate. After that, the governor has a say. If the governor signs the bill, it becomes law.

The bill was introduced early in January 1996. At the time of introduction, each bill receives its first reading. The state constitution says that each bill must be "read" on three separate occasions before a final vote can be taken. Nowadays, only the bill titles are read. Years ago, however, the entire bills were read aloud for legislators.

As the bill sponsor, Representative Opatz arranged to present the bill before a House committee. The legislators on the committee could then discuss the bill and, possibly make changes to it.

Each of the many committees in the House has one specialty. Just as a member of the school band concentrates on one instrument, each committee looks at one area of state law.

The bill Representative Opatz introduced said that insurance companies would have to pay for mothers and newborns to stay in the hospital for at least two days after a normal birth.

Because Representative Opatz's bill

had to do with health care, it was considered by the House Health and Human Services Committee.

At the committee hearing, Representative Opatz said that too many mothers and newborns were being sent home one day after the birth, only to have to rush back to the hospital a little later.

People who spoke against the bill said that it was not the place of government to decide a medical issue. They said the decision for how long a mother and child should remain in a hospital should be left up to the doctor.

**To become law, a bill must be approved by a majority of members in the House of Representatives and a majority of members in the Senate.**

The Health and Human Services Committee approved the bill on Jan. 18, 1996. Representative Opatz then had to bring his plan to another House committee.

Because the bill also had to do with medical insurance, the House Financial Institutions and Insurance Committee needed to have a say.

Representative Opatz explained the bill to members of that group on Jan. 24, 1996. The bill was quickly approved.

## Timeline

### January 1996

- 25 Bill introduced in the House
- 29 Bill introduced in the Senate

### February 1996

- 8 Frog study bill approved by House Environment and Natural Resources Committee
- 23 Frog study approved by Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee

### March 1996

- 11 House accepts compromise from conference committee; bill wins final passage
- 13 Senate accepts compromise from conference committee; bill wins final passage
- 19 Governor Carlson signs bill
- 20 New law takes effect

# The frog mystery

## Law seeks answers about deformed frogs

Meanwhile, a similar process was happening in the Senate.

There are usually about 20 representatives on each committee in the House. Most Senate committees are a bit smaller.

As it travels through the process, members of either the House or the Senate can ask that changes be made to the bill, called amendments. When changes are suggested, members are given the opportunity to accept or reject them by voting. In this case, both House committees amended the bill. So did the one Senate committee that the bill passed through.

After the committees have discussed a bill and made changes, the bill is sent back to the House or Senate floor. The second reading takes place when the bill gets to the floor with a recommendation to pass.

Bills that have received a second reading are placed on a list of bills awaiting further action.

All 134 representatives and 67 senators still had to have their chance to vote on the bill. The third

reading takes place before the vote on passage by the full House or Senate.

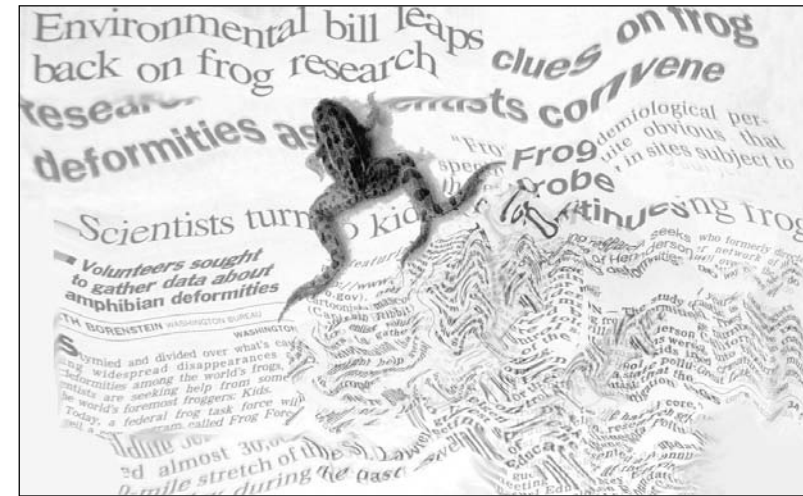
It is important to remember that the House and Senate must pass exactly the same bill before an idea can become law. In this case, there were some differences between the House plan and the Senate plan.

There is a process for ironing out those differences, and you'll learn about that later.

Eventually, the exact same bill passed both chambers. On March 11, 1996, the House voted 114-18 in favor of the proposal. The Senate passed the bill two days later on a 53-6 vote.

The bill was sent to Governor Arne Carlson, who signed it into law March 19, 1996. The new law then took effect the following day.

The law requires that health plans pay for new mothers and their babies to stay in the hospital for at least two days after a normal birth. If a mother agrees to go home earlier, the law requires the insurance company to pay for a nurse to visit the mother and child at home.



A group of junior high students discovered deformed frogs living near their town. The students were concerned, so they asked the Legislature to find out what was wrong.

Although you must be 18 years old to vote and 21 to serve in the Legislature, there is no age requirement to testify before a House or Senate committee.

Ideas for bills come from Minnesotans of all ages. Sometimes, in fact, a little youthful enthusiasm goes a long way.

Consider the mystery of the deformed frogs.

In the summer of 1995, a group of junior high students from the Minnesota New Country School in Henderson set off on a nature studies field trip. As they wandered through wetlands near the Minnesota River, the students noticed that more than half of the frogs hopping about were deformed. Many frogs were missing eyes or legs; some had damaged webbing and other abnormalities.

Back in the classroom, the students consulted the Internet to find out what was wrong with the frogs they had discovered. Their search for answers led them to scientists from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency. The agency is the part of the

the bill entirely. He said he didn't like it because it did not go far enough.

Governor Ventura said the entire law from 1963 should be eliminated.

He also said it is not the role of the governor or the Legislature to determine what evidence is allowed in court. That should be up to the courts, Governor Ventura said.

In most cases, a veto would be the end of the story, but this was not like most cases.

The Legislature has the option to override the governor's veto. That means lawmakers can make a bill become law even after it has been vetoed by the governor.

The catch is that it's very difficult to override a veto. It hadn't happened in years, until Carlson came along.

To override a veto, the House and Senate must vote on the bill again. But this time the bill needs more than a majority to vote yes.

An override requires two-thirds of all members of each house to vote for the bill. That means at least 45 senators and 90 representatives have to vote in favor.

In this case, there was such strong support for one young woman's effort that each house easily met the higher standard.

The Senate voted 59-1 to override Governor Ventura's veto. Then, on the last day of the 1999 Legislative Session, the House voted 109-19 for the override. The law took effect May 18, 1999.

It was the first time since 1982 that

**A bill can become law even after it has been vetoed, but it's not easy. To override a veto, the Legislature must pass the bill again with the support of at least two-thirds of all members in each chamber.**

a veto override had been completed.

That made Jodi-Michaëlle Carlson's quest a historic one. The law she fought for allowed her to have her day in court.

# Troubled teens

## Getting treatment for those in need

One family's troubles led to action at the Capitol. A law was passed to let parents decide if their teen-ager needs treatment.

Patrick and Lou had been noticing gradual changes in their 15-year-old son's behavior. He was hanging around a new group of friends. There were problems at school.

Then they started finding alcohol hidden in his room.

Their family doctor recommended that the three of them start seeing a counselor.

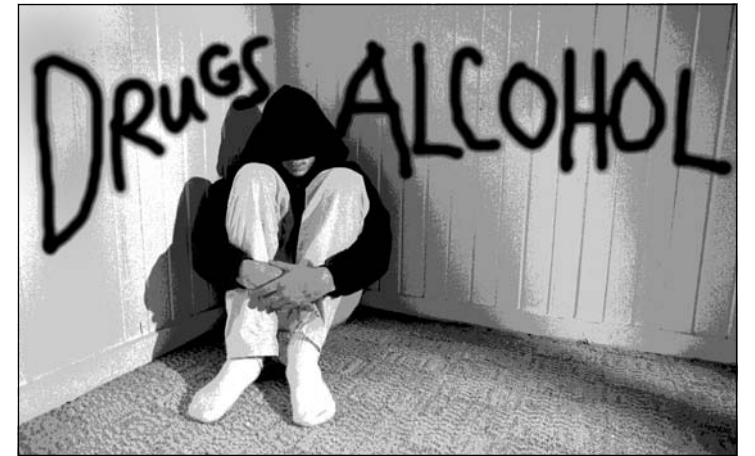
And it didn't take very long for the counselor to tell them that their son needed to go to treatment.

"In the same breath, she told us our son is 16, and if he chooses not to go, there's nothing we can do," the mother told a committee made up of members of the House of Representatives.

Not only did her son refuse treatment, he also stopped going to the family and individual counseling sessions.

The parents were stuck. They wanted to help their son overcome his chemical dependency problem. They were legally responsible for him until he turned 18. But state law said their son could not be forced into treatment unless he committed a crime.

The family was searching everywhere for an answer to their problem.



But the parents never anticipated they would help change the law that had caused the mess in the first place.

At the time, state law said that anyone under the age of 16 could be admitted into a chemical dependency treatment facility if their parents signed a consent form.

But anyone age 16 or older had to

**Facts**



**2,640**  
Number of 16- and 17-year-olds admitted to treatment during 1998 in Minnesota



**1**  
Rank of marijuana use among reasons teens entered treatment



**170 %**  
Increase from 1993 to 1998 in the number of teens admitted to treatment in the state

commit themselves voluntarily in order to be given treatment.

Lou couldn't believe her ears when the counselor told her this. So eventually she decided to call state Senator Claire Robling of Prior Lake, who had been her friend for many years, to see if Senator Robling even knew that such a law existed.

She didn't. But Senator Robling knew right away that she had to do something about it.

"I could imagine myself in that position," she said. "Parents could see that happening and not be able to put them in treatment. I couldn't stand that thought."

Then Senator Robling asked Lou if she would testify in favor of such a bill, and she immediately agreed.

During the next legislative session, Senator Robling introduced a bill that would still allow children age 16 and 17 to commit themselves to chemical dependency treatment, but it would give parents the option of making the decision for their kids.

In either case, the bill said, a counselor would have to

conduct an independent evaluation of the patient to determine if treatment is necessary.

Then Senator Robling had to find a member of the House of Representatives to sponsor the bill. That person was Representative Mark Buesgens from Jordan.

**A**fter the bill was introduced, it was assigned to one of several different committees in both the House and the Senate. When a bill is assigned to a committee, that group will then give it an official "hearing."

At a hearing, or meeting, the members listen to advice and opinions about a bill from experts and regular citizens. Anyone can testify at a hearing, and all hearings are open to the public.

In this case, the legislators asked Lou to testify. In other cases, people will come to the legislators or the committee and ask to testify for or against a bill.

Either way, many people testify before committees every day, and there's nothing special about it. You don't have to be an expert or know a lot about a topic. You simply need a story to tell and a perspective on an issue.

And there's no age limit to testify, either.

Carlson had costly medical bills, and her life had changed forever when she was paralyzed. She wished to collect payment from the automaker because she experienced so much pain and hardship as a result. She planned to show that Hyundai had installed defective seat belts.

Carlson thought the car company should be held responsible for the safety of its product. But her court case could not go anywhere unless she got a change in Minnesota law.

**I**n 1999, Carlson brought her problem to the Legislature.

Representative Mary Jo McGuire of Falcon Heights introduced a bill on behalf of Carlson. Senator Leo Foley of Coon Rapids carried the bill in the Senate.

The bill said there should be an exception to the gag rule for people like Carlson. The gag rule would not be totally eliminated. But there would be no gag when someone was trying to sue over damages caused by a defective seat belt.

At first, it was fairly smooth sailing for the bill.

The proposal had to travel through only one committee in the House and one committee in the Senate before it went to the floor in each chamber for a final vote.

And it passed easily. The House voted 118-11 for the bill. The vote was 64-0 in the Senate. The bill was sent to the governor for final approval.

Then things got a bit more complicated.

**A**s you know, the House and the Senate have to agree on the exact same bill before it can become law.

But there is one more step. The governor, as the highest elected official in Minnesota, also must be in agreement.

Once the governor receives the bill from the Legislature, he or she can do one of three things: sign the bill into law, veto the bill, or take no action, which generally means the bill will become law without the governor's signature.

**What is a veto? It is the power of the governor to prevent a bill from becoming law by refusing to sign it and returning it to the Legislature.**

A veto is the governor's way of saying no. A bill that is vetoed is sent back to the Legislature, rather than joining the list of new laws.

In April 1999, Governor Jesse Ventura vetoed the bill that called for an exception to the seat belt gag rule.

The governor did not disagree with

**Timeline** ▶

**January 1999**

- 14 Senate bill introduced
- 19 House bill introduced

**February 1999**

- 1 Senate Judiciary Committee approves bill
- 18 House Civil Law Committee approves bill

**March 1999**

- 4 Bill passes full House
- 15 Senate Health and Family Security Committee approves bill
- 29 Bill passes full Senate

**April 1999**

- 19 House passes bill
- 27 Bill vetoed by Governor Ventura
- 28 Senate votes to override veto

**May 1999**

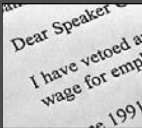
- 17 House votes to override veto
- 18 Law takes effect

## Facts



250

Number of bills passed in 1999 and sent to the governor



18

Number of those bills vetoed by the governor



1

Number of those vetoes overridden by the 1999 Legislature

end, she had to convince legislators to do something they hadn't done in 17 years — override a governor's veto.

The odds were against her, but she succeeded.

Carlson hadn't even been born yet when legislators passed the law in question, called the "seat belt gag rule."

The law was passed in 1963. It says that whether a person was wearing a seat belt cannot be considered by courts when deciding personal injury or property damage claims from a car crash.

In the court system, to "gag" someone is to ban them from saying certain things. Sometimes a judge will place a "gag order" on the lawyers and the people involved in a trial or other legal proceeding. Other times, like this one, a law stops people from talking about evidence or issues in the courtroom.

There was a perfectly good reason for the law to be passed in 1963. Lawmakers wanted to make sure people did not get unfairly punished for not wearing their seat belts.

Imagine a car accident involving Mr. Brown and Mr.

Smith. Say the crash happened when Mr. Brown was driving carefully on his way to the supermarket. Mr. Smith was speeding and driving recklessly down the same road. When Mr. Brown stopped for a red light, his car was smashed from behind by Mr. Smith's car. Mr. Brown was not wearing his seat belt, and he suffered several broken bones.

Now imagine that Mr. Brown decided to sue for money to pay his hospital bills. Someone might say that the broken bones were his own fault because he didn't buckle up. Do you think that sounds fair?

Minnesota lawmakers didn't think so in 1963. That's why they passed a law saying that court cases had to leave out information about whether someone was wearing a seat belt.

What does all this have to do with Carlson? Well, she had a problem. It seems the seat belt gag rule was applied to all cases, even one about a defective seat belt.

How could Carlson prove the seat belt didn't work if she couldn't even say whether she had the seat belt fastened?

But if you've never been to the Capitol, it can be intimidating to sit before the members of the House and the Senate and tell them your opinions.

Especially when your story is as personal as it was for this family.

Lou said she had always thought of hers as a normal family — they go to church, she volunteers at school, her husband teaches at the high school, and her other children are active in sports.

She was determined to show the legislators how devastating her son's problem was for her family. She also wanted to show them that it could happen to anyone.

But she was a little nervous about testifying at the Legislature, because she wasn't sure what the committee members would ask her.

She testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee in January 1999. The legislators did have several questions, but they seemed to be thinking about what they would do if they were in her same situation, she said.

The committee approved the bill and referred it to another Senate committee, called the Health and Family Security Committee. That committee also approved the bill.

Meanwhile, a similar bill was going

through the same process in the House, where Lou testified before the House Civil Law Committee in February 1999.

"It is highly questionable that a 16- or 17-year-old who is chemically dependent can make this choice by themselves," Representative Buesgens said at the committee meeting.

The legislators on the committee

**At a committee hearing, members listen to the opinions of experts and regular citizens. Anyone can testify, and all hearings are open to the public.**

agreed and sent the bill on to the full House of Representatives.

In order for a bill to become law, the House and Senate must pass exactly the same bill. Sometimes they don't resolve their differences until after the bill passes both houses. Then they need what is called a conference committee, which will be explained later in this book.

In other situations, one chamber will pass its version of a bill first and send it over to the other chamber. It just depends on which one — the House or the Senate — acts faster.

In this case, the bill had traveled

## Timeline



January 1999

28 Bill introduced in House

February 1999

2 Bill introduced in Senate

March 1999

10 House Civil Law Committee approves bill  
10 Senate Judiciary Committee approves bill  
22 Full Senate passes bill

April 1999

12 Bill signed into law by Governor Ventura

August 1999

1 Law takes effect

more quickly through the House, so that became the official version. The bill passed the House and was sent over to the Senate.

When all was said and done, the House and the Senate had passed the exact same bill by overwhelming majorities. In the House, the vote was 126-5. In the Senate, the vote was 61-0.

**The sponsor is responsible for the bill as it moves through the process. It's up to this person to appear before the committee to argue on behalf of the bill.**

Governor Jesse Ventura signed the bill on April 12, 1999. Minnesota law regarding sending minors to treatment changed officially on Aug. 1, 1999, which was the time when most laws the Legislature passed that year took effect.

However, the law was too late to help Lou and her family.

Her son turned 18 on the day that she testified before the Senate committee. And despite her efforts to change the law, he had continued to refuse treatment and to mess with drugs and alcohol.

"This young man has two parents who have taken him through

counseling, who have been told by a variety of professionals that (treatment) was what he needed," Lou said. And those professionals kept telling her, "Maybe if he gets in trouble with the law he would be court-ordered."

Ultimately, he did get the treatment that he needed, but not until after the police became involved.

"It was too late for him," Senator Robling said. "But I really admire her for trying to change this for other families.

"In a time when we have such an emphasis on parental responsibility," Senator Robling said, "here we had a parent who really wanted to help her son and her hands were tied because of our law."

In the future, other parents won't face the problem that affected Patrick and Lou. The law changed thanks to their efforts and the work of others at the Capitol.

Note: The names of the family members in this story have been changed at their request.

# Seat belt suit

## Law changes court rules for testimony



**A 19-year-old woman was paralyzed in a car accident. She believed her seat belt didn't work as it should have, and she wanted to sue the automaker. It took a new law to make that possible.**

Jodi-Michaëlle Carlson was only 19 when she was in a car accident that left her paralyzed.

Carlson was a passenger in her friend's Hyundai Excel. They were traveling on a road in northern Minnesota near the Paul Bunyan State Forest late one April evening in 1995.

After the driver swerved to avoid an

animal on the road, the Hyundai went into the ditch and flipped over.

Carlson was wearing her seatbelt, but she was still seriously hurt. Later, she found out that a problem with the seatbelt might have actually caused her injuries, rather than preventing them.

The young woman believed she deserved some compensation for her pain and suffering. She decided to sue the company that made the car. Her hope was to go to court and to force the company to give her some money as a payback for her troubles.

But she got more bad news in court. She discovered that an old state law would halt her lawsuit against the automaker.

Carlson had to bring her cause before the Legislature and ask for a new state law to change the old law. And in the

# The end of the road

## Auto inspections get ditched



That created a problem. The House and Senate must pass *exactly* the same bill before it can be sent to the governor.

The solution to that problem is another committee meeting. When the House and Senate pass different versions of the same bill, they must work out the differences in a conference committee.

Three senators and three representatives were assigned to the conference committee. They were soon able to find a compromise.

The conference committee approved a plan to end testing by March 1, 2000. They also agreed that the testing could end earlier if the air quality was good enough.

Members of the full House and full

Senate soon voted in favor of the compromise, and the bill was sent to the governor.

Supporters of the bill were pleased when Governor Jesse Ventura signed the bill into law on May 18, 1999.

Those supporters got more good news in October 1999. The state announced that the air quality in the Twin Cities met requirements for the testing to end.

**When the House and Senate pass different versions of the same bill, legislators must work out the differences in a conference committee.**

The state decided to halt vehicle inspections on Dec. 1, 1999. On that date, the nine inspection stations around the Twin Cities area were closed.

After eight years, Minnesota stopped the testing of motor vehicle exhaust systems. The change saved car owners time and money. Here's how it happened.

Lawmakers sometimes pass a new law to get rid of an old one they don't like.

For example, state law used to require vehicle owners to have their cars inspected every year, but no more. That old law was ditched in 1999.

The testing program was created to clean up the air by reducing pollution from autos. Annual inspections made sure each vehicle's exhaust system, including the muffler, was working properly.

Back in the late 1980s, a U.S. government agency told the state of Minnesota that pollution in the Twin Cities area had gotten too bad. The state had to do something about it.

Members of the Minnesota Legislature passed a law in 1988 that created the automobile testing program, and inspection stations around the metro area opened in 1991. Only people who lived in the Twin Cities area were required to get their cars, trucks, and vans inspected.

## Facts



**1988**  
Year the Legislature passed emissions testing plan



**1991**  
Year testing began at stations throughout Twin Cities area



**1995**  
Year the Legislature dropped testing of newer vehicles

After a few years, it was decided that newer cars did not need to be checked. Testing was limited to vehicles at least five years old.

Still, the testing was not a favorite of many citizens, who thought it was costly and inconvenient. Auto owners had to pay \$8 for the testing each year, and their vehicles had to pass before they could get license plate tabs.

If the inspection found something wasn't up to snuff, the vehicle owner faced repair bills sometimes amounting to hundreds of dollars.

"I would say that 80 percent of the public is in favor of abandoning the testing," said Representative Barb Haake from Mounds View. She was the sponsor of the bill in the state House of Representatives.

But it wasn't the unpopularity of the program alone that led to its demise. The most important thing was news about the environment in the Twin Cities area.

Over the years, the air in the Twin Cities had improved in some ways. There had been a reduction in the kind of pollution that was the target of the auto inspections.

Many people said the testing program could be thanked for that. Others pointed out that new cars and trucks produce less pollution than older models.

All of those factors convinced many people that the inspection program was no longer needed. The trick was to get enough lawmakers to agree on a plan to end emissions testing.

Representative Haake was in her first year as a lawmaker when she took up the issue during the 1999 Legislative Session. In early January, she introduced a bill that called for the emissions testing to halt after July 1, 2000.

The bill was sent to the House Transportation Policy Committee, which is a panel of 22 lawmakers. The committee studies issues having to do with the ways people and goods move throughout the state.

When Representative Haake's bill went to the Transportation Policy Committee, there seemed to be agreement that the vehicle inspections should end. The committee approved the bill and sent it along to the House Environment and Natural Resources Policy Committee.

Often, a bill will have to travel to more than one committee because the issues covered in the bill do not fit neatly into one area of policy. For example, Representative Haake's bill had to do with both the cars we drive and the air we breathe. It was clear that the bill needed to be considered by committees related to both transportation and the environment.

The Environment and Natural Resources Policy Committee approved the emissions bill, but only after making some changes. By approving the bill, the committee recommended that it be passed by the entire House of Representatives.

Members of the committee had already determined *if* the testing should end. Discussion among them focused on *when* the program should end.

Some lawmakers wanted to stop testing as soon as possible. Others were worried that ending testing before the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency gave the OK could cost the state money it gets from the U.S. government to pay for road work.

The committee approved a change, or amendment, that said the testing could end before July 1, 2000, if the air quality in the Twin Cities area was found to meet certain standards set by the U.S. government.

Next stop for the bill was the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance Committee, where debate again focused on when the testing should end.

The finance committee approved an amendment that would have ended testing six months sooner. The bill then called for the program to be eliminated no later than Jan. 1, 2000.

At that point, the bill was ready to be sent to the full House so all the members could vote on it. On March 29, 1999, the House voted 93-40 in favor of the plan to end emissions testing. The bill was then sent over to the Senate.

A bill must pass the House and Senate before it goes to the governor, who then must decide whether or not to sign it.

**A bill will be examined by more than one committee if the issues covered in the bill do not fit neatly into one area of policy.**

Senator James Metzen from South St. Paul was the sponsor of the bill in the Senate. He quickly guided the bill through a committee and to the full Senate. On April 14, 1999, the Senate voted 54-9 in favor of the bill.

However, the Senate changed the bill by moving the end date for inspections back to July 1, 2000.

## Timeline



### January 1999

- 7 Bill to end testing for all vehicles introduced in House
- 14 Bill introduced in Senate

### February 1999

- 4 Bill approved by House Transportation Committee
- 25 Bill approved by House Environment and Natural Resources Policy Committee

### March 1999

- 17 Bill approved by House Environment and Natural Resources Finance Committee
- 29 House passes bill

### April 1999

- 9 Bill approved by Senate Rules and Administration Committee
- 14 Senate passes bill

- 19 House names three people to conference committee
- 20 Senate names three people to conference committee

### May 1999

- 11 House passes compromise bill
- 12 Senate passes compromise bill
- 18 Governor signs bill into law

### December 1999

- 1 Emissions testing stations close