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Sponsorship and Cosponsorship of House Bills

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A Representative who introduces a bill or other measure in the House is called its *sponsor*. Under House Rule XII, several Members together may submit a bill, but the first-named Representative is considered the chief sponsor; the others are considered *cosponsors*. A bill can have only one chief sponsor.

Sponsorship of a Bill

Representatives introduce bills in the House chamber by placing them in the clerk's "hopper" at the rostrum while the House is in session. A bill's chief sponsor's original signature must appear on the measure when it is introduced. Cosponsors do not have to affix their signatures to the bill; the chief sponsor need only submit a list of their names when the bill is dropped in the hopper.

In a strictly formal sense, sponsorship of a bill only identifies the Representative who introduces it, and does not necessarily indicate support. A Member may, for example, introduce a bill as a courtesy, such as legislation proposed by the President. In such a case, the sponsor may designate the bill as introduced "by request." Cosponsors, on the other hand, commonly add their names to a bill to indicate support.

After a bill is placed in the hopper, the chief sponsor may withdraw it without formal floor action until it receives a number and is printed and referred to committee. Once referred, neither the sponsor nor any cosponsor nor any other Member may withdraw it, even by unanimous consent. The measure becomes the property of the House, and the House may act on it even if the chief sponsor resigns from the House, or dies.

Cosponsorship of a Bill

Representatives may cosponsor a bill either at the time of its introduction or subsequently. Members whose names are submitted with a bill at the time of introduction are commonly referred to as "original cosponsors." Once a bill has been introduced, Members may add their names as cosponsors until the bill has been reported from all the committees to which it is referred.



The names of added cosponsors appear in the *Congressional Record* and in any subsequent prints of the bill. House Rule XII provides that a bill may be reprinted if 20 or more cosponsors have been added since the previous printing, and the chief sponsor submits a written request for the Speaker to reprint the bill.

A cosponsor may also have his or her name removed from a bill until the last committee of referral has reported. For this purpose, either the cosponsor or the chief sponsor of the bill must request unanimous consent on the House floor.

Rules governing the number of cosponsors permitted on a bill have changed over the years. From 1967 to 1979, House rules limited the number of cosponsors to 25 per bill, requiring the introduction of identical bills when the number of cosponsors exceeded 25. Since 1979, an unlimited number of cosponsors has been allowed. Cosponsors on private bills are prohibited under the rules, but have appeared from time to time.

Becoming a Cosponsor

Before a bill is formally introduced, a Member who wishes to become a cosponsor may contact the sponsoring Member's office and request his or her name be added to the bill. A form listing cosponsors is kept, usually by a staff aide, and submitted along with the bill at introduction. After the bill is introduced, a Member may also contact the chief sponsor's office and ask to be listed as a cosponsor. The chief sponsor decides when to submit these additional cosponsors to the House clerk for publication in the *Congressional Record*.

Supporters of a bill often seek cosponsors in hope of demonstrating its popularity and improving its chances for passage. One of the most common techniques is the "Dear Colleague" letter, a mass mailing to most or all Members soliciting support for the bill. These letters are so called after the appellation with which they always begin.

No House rules or formal procedures govern "Dear Colleague" letters. They are, in effect, the sponsor's advertisements for the bill. Typically, the letters briefly state the issue the bill addresses, its major components, and its remedial impact, and include an appeal to join as a cosponsor. Almost always, they carry the name and phone number of a staff aide.