

# A Brief Look at Missouri State Government

## Executive Branch Officials

**Governor** — The governor is the state’s top elected official. The governor’s powers include appointing directors of state agencies, naming citizens to serve on a number of boards and commissions, and filling vacancies for most county offices. The governor also appoints some judges, including appeals and supreme court judges.

Each January the governor delivers a “State of the State” address to the General Assembly and submits a proposed state budget. Following action on bills by the legislature, the governor has the option of signing the bill into law, or exercising gubernatorial veto power to prevent a bill from becoming law. The legislature can override a governor’s veto with a two-thirds majority vote in both houses.

The governor also has the power to pardon individuals who have committed crimes, call special sessions of the General Assembly and may call out the National Guard to respond to emergencies. The governor must be at least 30 years old, a U.S. citizen for 15 years, and a resident of Missouri for 10 years. The governor may serve only two four-year terms.



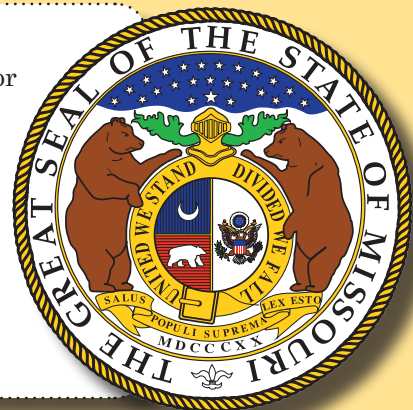
**Lieutenant Governor** — The lieutenant governor serves as the ex officio president of the Missouri Senate and often presides over that body. The lieutenant governor presides over joint sessions of the General Assembly and may vote to break ties in the Senate.

The lieutenant governor also serves as the state’s official ombudsman, and serves as a member of: the Missouri Tourism Commission; Missouri Development Finance Board; the Missouri Housing Development Commission; the Missouri Rural Economic Development Council; and the Board of Public Buildings.

Should the governor be unable to carry out the duties of office because of death, resignation, disability, or absence, the lieutenant governor serves as governor. Qualifications are the same for governor and lieutenant governor.

**Secretary of State** — The secretary of state is responsible for a wide variety of responsibilities, all related to providing and preserving information for the public. The secretary of state serves as Missouri’s chief elections official, is responsible for maintaining and preserving current and historic records, oversees the State Library, regulates the securities industry, and also serves as the filing agency for business, corporate and uniform commercial code records.

The secretary of state is the custodian of the Great Seal of the State of Missouri, and authenticates official documents of the governor. The office is also responsible for registering notaries public and trademarks, filing administrative rules, and publishing the Missouri Register, the Code of State Regulations and the state’s Official Manual, known as the “Blue Book.”





**Auditor** — The auditor is responsible for auditing the finances of all state agencies, boards and commissions and Missouri’s third and fourth class counties. In addition, citizens may petition the auditor to audit local governmental bodies.

Audits are performed to ensure that tax dollars are being spent efficiently, economically and legally. Often, the auditor is referred to as a “watchdog” for taxpayers. The auditor must have the same qualifications as the governor.



**Treasurer** — The treasurer is the custodian of the state’s money. In that role, the treasurer invests state monies not needed to meet current operating expenses of the state in interest-bearing accounts to generate additional revenues for the state. The treasurer also handles the Unclaimed Property Program, which attempts to return forgotten funds deposited in banks to their owners.

The treasurer has the same residency requirements as the secretary of state and is limited to serving two terms.



**Attorney General** — The attorney general serves as the lawyer for the state, representing the legal interests of Missouri government agencies and its citizens. The attorney general represents the citizens as a group, including matters related to consumer issues.

The attorney general also issues legal opinions to statewide officials, members of the General Assembly, and other state and local government officials.

The attorney general must be an attorney and must live in Jefferson City while in office.



# The Missouri Legislature

The Missouri legislature, known as the General Assembly, is composed of two “houses.” The upper house is called the Senate, and the larger of the two is called the House of Representatives. Both houses meet annually, beginning on the first Wednesday after the first Monday in January. No bills may be considered after 6 p.m. on the first Friday after the second Monday in May. The General Assembly also meets on the first Wednesday following the second Monday in September to consider bills vetoed by the governor.

Each house decides its own rules and procedures and is required to keep a daily record of its work.

## Senate

There are 34 members in the Senate, who each represents approximately 165,000 people. Senate terms are four years, with one-half of the Senate up for election every two years. Senate candidates must be at least 30 years old at the time of election, a qualified Missouri voter for three years, and a resident of the district for at least one year.

While the Missouri Constitution provides for the lieutenant governor to serve as president of the Senate, the president pro tem, elected by the members, presides most of the time and holds much of the power.

The Senate also approves most of the appointments made by the governor to head state agencies and to serve on state boards and commissions.



## House of Representatives

The House of Representatives has 163 members, who each represents approximately 34,000 people. House terms are for two years. House candidates must be at least 24 years old at the time of election, a qualified voter of the state for two years, and a resident of the district for at least one year.

The speaker of the House, elected by the members, presides over the House and is its main officer.

# How a Bill Becomes Law

For a bill to become a law, it must be approved by both houses of the General Assembly and by the governor. The following is a brief outline of the process:

1. A bill is introduced and read for the first time in its *house of origin*. Ordinarily, on first, second and third reading, only the title is read aloud.
2. The bill is read for the second time on a different day.
3. The *speaker of the House* or the *president pro tempore of the Senate* assigns the bill to a committee.
4. The committee holds one or more hearings on the bill. Testimony for and against the bill is presented.
5. The committee votes on the bill, and makes a recommendation to the whole house in favor of, or in opposition to its passage.
6. Bills that are reported from a committee with a favorable recommendation are placed on the calendar for debate in front of the full house. Bills that are reported with an unfavorable recommendation go no further.
7. The full house *perfects* the bill by debating its merits and amending it as it sees fit. A vote is taken, and if a majority of those present vote in favor of the bill, it is printed in its amended form.
8. The bill is then read for the third time and debated. If a *constitutional majority* votes in favor of the bill, it is delivered to the other house and it goes through the same process.
9. If the bill passes the second house without any changes, it is signed by the *House speaker* and the *Senate president pro tempore* and delivered to the governor for approval or veto.
10. If the bill is changed in any way by the second house, it is returned to the *house of origin* for approval. If the bill is not approved, a conference committee, made up of members of both houses, is appointed. The conference committee may recommend the House version, the Senate version or some compromise to the two houses.
11. If the bill recommended by the conference committee passes both houses by a *constitutional majority*, it is signed by the *House speaker* and the *Senate president pro tempore* and delivered to the governor for approval or veto.
12. If the governor approves a bill or does not act by the prescribed time limits, it becomes law. If the governor *veto*es a bill, it does not become law, and it is returned to the *house of origin*.
13. The General Assembly can *override a veto* by a two-thirds vote of both houses.

# The Missouri Judicial System

The judicial branch of Missouri government has three levels: circuit, appeals and supreme. All judges must be licensed to practice law in Missouri and are required to retire at age 70.

At the trial level are the circuit and associate circuit courts. Missouri has 45 judicial circuits, divided along county lines. Every circuit contains at least one circuit judge and at least one associate circuit judge for each county within the circuit. Associate circuit judges must be at least 25 years of age, a qualified voter of Missouri, and a resident of the county. Circuit judges must be at least 30 years of age, a citizen of the United States at least 10 years, a qualified voter of Missouri at least three years, and a resident of the circuit at least one year. Circuit judges have six-year terms, while associate circuit judges have four-year terms. Circuit courts handle civil and criminal trials.

The next level is the appellate court. There are three appeals court districts in Missouri, located in St. Louis, Kansas City and Springfield. The courts of appeal hear cases from lower courts whose decisions have been appealed and which are not reserved exclusively for the Missouri Supreme Court. Appeals court judges must be at least 30 years old, residents of their district, U.S. citizens for at least 15 years, and Missouri voters for nine years before their selection. Appellate judges are appointed, and then retained by a favorable vote of the people every 12 years.

The Missouri Supreme Court, the state's highest court, hears cases appealed from the courts of appeal or those involving the death penalty, a U.S. treaty or statute, the Missouri Constitution, the state's revenue laws, and the title to any state office. The supreme court also supervises all lower courts in the state.

There are seven judges on the supreme court, which have the same qualifications and terms as appeals court judges. The chief justice position is rotated between members every two years.

