

CRS Report for Congress

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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, clause 7, several Members together may submit a bill, but the first-named Member is considered the chief or primary sponsor; the others are considered *cosponsors*. A bill can have only one primary sponsor. For more information on legislative process, see [<http://www.crs.gov/products/guides/guidehome.shtml>].¹

Sponsorship of a Bill. Representatives introduce bills in the House chamber by placing them in the clerk's "hopper," a box at the rostrum, while the House is in session. The original signature of the primary sponsor must appear on the measure when it is introduced. Cosponsors do not have to affix their signatures to the bill; the primary sponsor need only submit a list of names when the bill is dropped in the hopper. Cosponsors commonly ask the sponsors to add their names to a bill to signal support for the measure.

Sponsorship formally only identifies the Representative who introduced it, and it does not necessarily indicate support for the measure. In practice, however, Members sponsor bills they support. On occasion, a Representative may introduce a bill as a courtesy, such as legislation proposed by the President or senior Administration officials. In such a case, the sponsor may designate the bill as introduced "by request." As House Rule XII states, "When a bill or resolution is introduced 'by request,' those words shall be entered on the Journal and printed in the Congressional Record."

After a bill is placed in the hopper, the primary sponsor may withdraw it unilaterally until it receives a number and is referred to committee. Once referred, neither the sponsor nor any cosponsor nor any other Member may withdraw the bill, even by unanimous consent. The measure becomes the property of the House, and the House may act on it even if the primary 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

¹ This report was originally written by the late Richard C. Sachs. Please direct any inquiries to the listed author.

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 (or been discharged from the committees).

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 primary 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 primary 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 are prohibited under the rules on private bills, but have appeared from time to time.

Gaining Cosponsors. Before a bill is formally introduced, a Member or an aide acting at his or her direction, who wishes to become a cosponsor may contact the sponsoring Member's office and request that 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 primary sponsor's office and ask to be listed as a cosponsor. The primary 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 for soliciting support for a bill is the "Dear Colleague" letter, a mass mailing to selected or all Members. These letters are so called after the salutation with which they begin.

No House rules or formal procedures govern "Dear Colleague" letters. They are, in effect, a sponsor's advertisement for a bill. Typically, the letters briefly state the issue the bill addresses, its major components, and its policy importance, and include an appeal to join as a cosponsor. Almost always, they carry the name and phone number of a staff aide to contact. (See CRS Report RS21667, *'Dear Colleague' Letters: A Brief Overview*, by R. Eric Petersen, for more information.)

Finding Sponsors and Cosponsors in LIS. Sponsors and cosponsors of bills and amendments may be searched by Member name in the automated *Legislative Information System (LIS)*. From the LIS home page, under the "Home" tab, click on "Sponsors/Cosponsors." The resulting list may be searched alphabetically. Sponsors and cosponsors are also identified under the summary of each bill that has been introduced.