

## State Legislative Terms of Office

By: Matthew H. Frame, Legislative Analyst II  
June 10, 2022 | 2022-R-0056

### Issue

This report outlines state legislative terms of office and term limits. It updates OLR Report [2005-R-0945](#).

### Summary

State legislative terms of office vary across the country between two-year and four-year terms, or more commonly, a combination of both depending on the chamber the legislator is serving in. Legislative terms may also be adjusted to account for the legislative redistricting cycle that takes place every decade.

Additionally, 15 states have adopted legislative term limits, restricting the amount of time any person may serve in the state legislature. Five states have lifetime limits, allowing a legislator to only serve a set number of years in their lifetime. Alternatively, 10 states have consecutive limits, allowing legislators to return to service in their legislative chamber after a set period.

### Terms of Office

Across the United States, the term length for state senators varies, and to a lesser extent, state representatives. States fall into one of four models:

1. in five states, senators and representatives both serve four-year terms;
2. in 26 states, senators serve four-year terms and representatives serve two-year terms;
3. in 12 states, senators and representatives both serve two-year terms; and
4. in seven states, senators serve either two- or four-year terms while representatives serve two-year terms.

Due to redistricting and adopting a new state legislative map every 10 years, the seven states using the fourth model elect senators for one two-year term and two four-year terms. Some states stagger the two-year term for certain legislative districts throughout the ten-year period (e.g., in a given election, one-third of senators are elected for a two-year term, the other two-thirds elected for four-year terms). Other states designate one election where all legislators are elected for two years.

In the remaining 31 states that authorize four-year terms, but do not adjust for reapportionment, the legislature either delays implementation of the new legislative map until the next election or allows the current legislators to continue to serve until the term expiration, despite the new map.

Additionally, 27 states stagger their senate terms. This means that senate races are grouped and contested during different election years versus all senate races being contested at once. Below are the group of states that have adopted each model.

**Table 1: States With Four-Year Senate and House Terms**

Alabama	Maryland	North Dakota*
Louisiana	Mississippi	

**Table 2: States With Four-Year Senate Terms, but Two-Year House Terms**

Arkansas*	Missouri*	South Carolina
California*	Montana*	Tennessee*
Colorado*	Nebraska**	Utah*
Hawaii*	Nevada*	Virginia
Indiana*	New Mexico	Washington*
Iowa*	Ohio*	West Virginia*
Kansas	Oklahoma*	Wisconsin*
Kentucky*	Oregon*	Wyoming*
Michigan	Pennsylvania*	

**Table 3: States With Two-Year Senate and House Terms**

Arizona	Maine	North Carolina
Connecticut	Massachusetts	Rhode Island
Georgia	New Hampshire	South Dakota
Idaho	New York	Vermont

**Table 4: States With Adjusted Two- and Four-Year Senate Terms**

Alaska*	Illinois*	New Jersey
Delaware*	Minnesota	Texas*
Florida*		

\* Staggered Elections

\*\*Staggered Elections and Unicameral Legislature

Sources: National Conference of State Legislatures, *Number of Legislators and Length of Terms in Years*,

<https://www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures/number-of-legislators-and-length-of-terms.aspx>; Council of State Governments, *Book of States, Vol. 53*, Table 3.3 (2021); and Ballotpedia, *Length of Terms of State Senators*, accessed June 10, 2022.

## Term Limits

Fifteen states have current term limits for state legislators. The term limits are divided into two categories: consecutive limits and lifetime limits. Consecutive term limits cap the number of terms or years a legislator may serve in a chamber and specify the period of time that a legislator must be out of office before being able to run again. Upon hitting the term limit in one chamber, legislators may leave the legislature or run for election in the other chamber. After a set waiting period (2-8 years, depending on the state), the legislator may run for election again in the original chamber and serve up to the limit.

Lifetime term limits cap the total number of terms a legislator may serve. If a legislator is elected to the legislature with a lifetime limit, they may not run again for election once they have served the maximum time. The tables below list these states and their associated limits. Additionally, six states (Idaho, Massachusetts, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming) previously implemented term limits, but those provisions have since been repealed by the legislature or invalidated by the state supreme court.

**Table 5: States With Consecutive Legislative Term Limits**

State	Senate	House	Waiting Period	Law
Arizona	4 Terms/8 Years	4 Terms/8 Years	One Term	<a href="#">Ariz. Const. Art. IV § 21</a>
Arkansas	12 Years in either chamber		4 Years	<a href="#">Ark. Const. Amend. 73</a>
Colorado	2 Terms/8 Years	4 Terms/8 Years	4 Years	<a href="#">Colo. Const. Art. V § 3</a>
Florida	2 Terms/8 Years	4 Terms/8 Years	One Term	<a href="#">Fla. Const Art. III § 15 &amp; Art. VI § 4</a>
Louisiana	3 Terms/12 Years	3 Terms/12 Years	One Term	<a href="#">Louis. Const. Art. III § 4</a>
Maine	4 Terms/8 Years	4 Terms/8 Years	One Term	<a href="#">21-A M.R.S. §§ 551-554</a>
Montana	2 Terms/8 Years	4 Terms/8 Years	8 Years	<a href="#">Mont. Const. Art. IV § 8</a>
Nebraska	2 Terms/8 Years		4 Years	<a href="#">Neb. Const. Art. III § 12</a>
Ohio	4 Terms/8 Years	4 Terms/8 Years	4 Years	<a href="#">Ohio Const. Art. II § 2</a>
South Dakota	4 Terms/8 Years	4 Terms/8 Years	2 Years	<a href="#">S. Dak. Const. Art. III § 6</a>

**Table 6: States With Lifetime Legislative Term Limits**

State	Senate	House	Law
California	12 Years in Both Chambers		<a href="#">Cal. Const. Art. IV § 2</a>
Michigan	2 Terms/8 Years	3 Terms/6 Years	<a href="#">Mich. Const. Art. IV § 54</a>
Missouri	2 Terms/8 Years	4 Terms/8 Years	<a href="#">Mo. Const. Art. III § 8</a>
Nevada	3 Terms/12 Years	6 Terms/12 Years	<a href="#">Nev. Const. Art. IV §§ 3-4</a>
Oklahoma	12 Years in Both Chambers		<a href="#">Okla. Const. Art. V § 17A</a>

MHF:kl