



## Policy Glossary

**Bill:** A bill is a legislative proposal, which would make law if it passes both the House and Senate and if it receives Presidential approval.

**Budget:** The document sent to Congress by the president early each year estimating government revenue and expenditures for the ensuing fiscal year.

**Conference:** Conference refers to a formal meeting, or series of meetings, between House and Senate Members. The purpose of a conference is to reconcile the differences between the House and Senate versions of a bill.

**Members:** Members are the individuals serving as senators or representative in Congress.

**Co-sponsor:** A co-sponsor is a member who formally adds his/her name as a supporter to another member's bill. An initial co-sponsor is one who was listed at the time of the bill's introduction.

**Dear colleague letter:** A dear colleague refers to a mass-produced letter sent by one member to all fellow members. "Dear colleagues" usually describe a new bill and ask for co-sponsors or ask for a member's vote on an issue.

**Discretionary:** Discretionary spending refers to spending set by annual appropriations levels made by decision of Congress. This spending is optional, and in contrast to entitlement programs for which funding is mandatory.

**Earmark:** Earmark funds are those dedicated for a specific program or purpose. Revenues are earmarked by law.

**Entitlement Spending:** Entitlement spending refers to funds for programs like Medicare/Medicaid, Social Security, & veterans' benefits. Funding levels are automatically set by the number of eligible recipients, not at the discretion of Congress. Each person eligible for benefits by law receives them unless Congress changes the eligibility criteria. Entitlement payments represent the largest portion of the federal budget.

**House of Representatives:** The House of Representatives, as distinct from the Senate, although each body is a "house" of Congress. There are 435 Representatives in the House.

**Fiscal Year:** The fiscal year for the federal government begins on October 1 and ends on September 30. For example, fiscal year 2004, or "fy '04" began on October 1, 2003 and ended on September 30, 2004.

# COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY COALITION



**Floor:** The floor refers to the chamber in the Capitol where members assemble to conduct debate and vote. Members are said to be “on the Floor” when they assemble, and “to have the Floor” when they speak.

**Law:** A law is a legislative proposal passed by both the House and the Senate and approved by the President.

**Legislation:** Legislation is the making of laws or the laws themselves.

**Mandatory:** Mandatory spending refers to funds not controlled by annual decision of Congress. These funds are automatically obligated by virtue of previously-enacted laws.

**Mark-up:** A mark-up refers to the meeting of a Committee held to review the text of a bill before reporting it out. Committee members offer and vote on proposed changes to the bill’s language, known as amendments. Most mark-ups end with a vote to send the new version of the bill to the floor for final approval.

**Override:** An override is the vote taken to pass a bill again, after it has been vetoed by the President. An override takes 2/3 vote in each chamber, or 290 in the House and 67 in the Senate, if all are present and voting. If the veto is overridden, the bill becomes law despite the objection of the President.

**Sponsor:** A sponsor is the member who introduces a bill and is its chief advocate.

**Staffer:** Staffer is the informal term used for anyone employed by an officer, member, or Committee of Congress.

**Veto:** Disapproval of a bill or joint resolution by the president.

## SOURCES:

- Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: [www.cbpp.org](http://www.cbpp.org)
- Alliance for Justice: [www.allianceforjustice.org](http://www.allianceforjustice.org)
- Friends Committee on National Legislation: [www.fcnl.org](http://www.fcnl.org)
- The Advocacy Institute: [www.advocacy.org](http://www.advocacy.org)
- Charity Lobbying in the Public Interest: [www.clpi.org](http://www.clpi.org)
- Federal Register: [www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/thomas.loc.gov](http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/thomas.loc.gov)
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