

History |

Florida's State Government

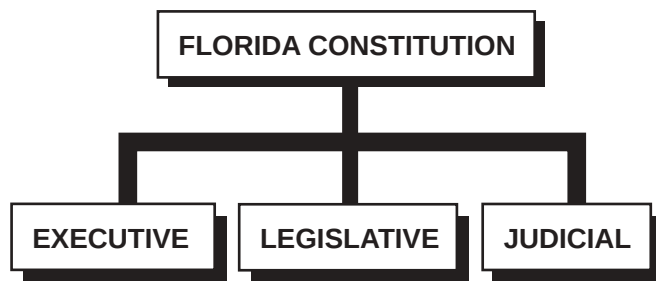
Florida's Constitution

The state's first constitution was written in 1838. The current constitution is Florida's sixth, and was adopted in 1968.

The constitution is reviewed every twenty years to determine whether or not revisions should be made by the legislature. These revisions are called amendments. In 1998, a revision was made to our state constitution involving the executive branch of government.

Florida's Branches of Government at the State Level

Just like the federal system, voters elect representatives to run the government in the state. In Florida there is an executive branch, a legislative branch, and a judicial branch.



The governor heads Florida's executive branch. In a way, the governor is the "President" of our state. He is in charge of carrying out our state laws. There have been 43 governors of the state of Florida. The first elected governor of Florida was William D. Moseley, who served from 1845 to 1849. Before Florida was a state, it was a U.S. territory, and the governor was appointed by the President rather than

elected by the people. William Pope DuVal was Florida's first territorial governor, 1822-1834. The most important job the governor has is to manage the state budget. He must plan how to best spend the state's money and present this plan to the legislature.

Florida has a lieutenant governor who works closely with the governor and helps with some of his responsibilities, somewhat like a Vice President. The governor also has people, called a cabinet, to help him run the state government. The cabinet consists of an Attorney General, Commissioner of Agriculture, and Chief Financial Officer.

The legislative branch of Florida's government makes the law. The legislative branch consists of two parts: the House of Representatives and the Senate. In the House of Representatives there are 120 representatives who represent the 120 house districts in our state. The districts are drawn up based on population, not by county lines. In the Senate there are 40 state senators.

In order for a bill to become a state law, the majority of the senators and representatives must pass it. If passed, the bill goes to the governor for his approval. If he signs the bill, it becomes a law. If he decides to veto it, the bill can still become a law but only if two thirds of both the House and

Senate vote for it again. This is how our check and balance system of government works; no one part has more power than another part.

The third branch of our state government is the judicial branch. This is the court system of our state. There are many levels in this system. The state Supreme Court is the highest court in Florida, and it is made up of seven judges. Each judge serves for six years and is appointed by the governor.

Florida's State Capital and Capitol

The city where the governor, senators, and representatives work is called the capital. The capital of Florida is Tallahassee. This city was chosen to be the state capital in 1824. During the Civil War, Tallahassee was the only Confederate capital east of the Mississippi not captured by the Federal army.

The building where the state's official business takes place is called the capitol, which means building where a legislature meets.

(Notice the two spellings - they are different and have different meanings, but both are important to government.) The first capitol was three log cabins. Then, in 1826, a two-story cement building was built to be the capitol. In 1893, the Florida legislature budgeted \$20,000 to build a newer, bigger building. This building was made of brick and is still part of the Capitol today. As Florida continued to grow, so did the state's government. Additions were made to the Capitol building in 1923, 1936 and 1947. And finally, in 1972-77 a new Capitol complex (many buildings together) was built to house government offices, including the House and Senate. The old Capitol building was saved and restored. It is open to the public for tours and houses the State's Museum of Florida History.

