

# Full- and Part-Time Legislatures

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It seems like an easy question: Which legislatures are full-time and which ones are part-time? But with 50 different formulas for designing a state legislature, it's difficult to paint this issue in black and white. So we've done it in green, gray and gold.

Being a legislator doesn't just mean attending [legislative sessions](#) and voting on proposed laws. State legislators also spend large amounts of time assisting constituents, studying state issues during the interim and campaigning for election. These activities go on throughout the year. Any assessment of the time requirements of the job should include all of these elements of legislative life.

Beyond that point, NCSL prefers to look more broadly at the capacity of legislatures to function as independent branches of government, capable of balancing the power of the executive branch and having the information necessary to make independent, informed policy decisions. To measure the capacity of legislatures, it's important to consider the amount of time legislators spend on the job, the amount they are compensated and the size of the legislature's staff.

NCSL has grouped the 50 state legislatures into three major categories: Green, Gray and Gold-and for those who want to know more, NCSL has provided some shading within those categories.

## Green Legislatures (Full-time, well-paid, large staff)

Green legislatures require the most time of legislators, usually 80 percent or more of a full-time job. They have large staffs. In most Green states, legislators are paid enough to make a living without requiring outside income. These legislatures are more similar to Congress than are the other state legislatures. Most of the nation's largest population states fall in this category. Because there are marked differences within the category, we have subdivided the Green states. Those in Green generally spend more time on the job because their sessions are longer and their districts larger than those in Green Lite. As a result, they tend to have more staff and are compensated at a higher rate. Within subcategories, states are listed alphabetically.

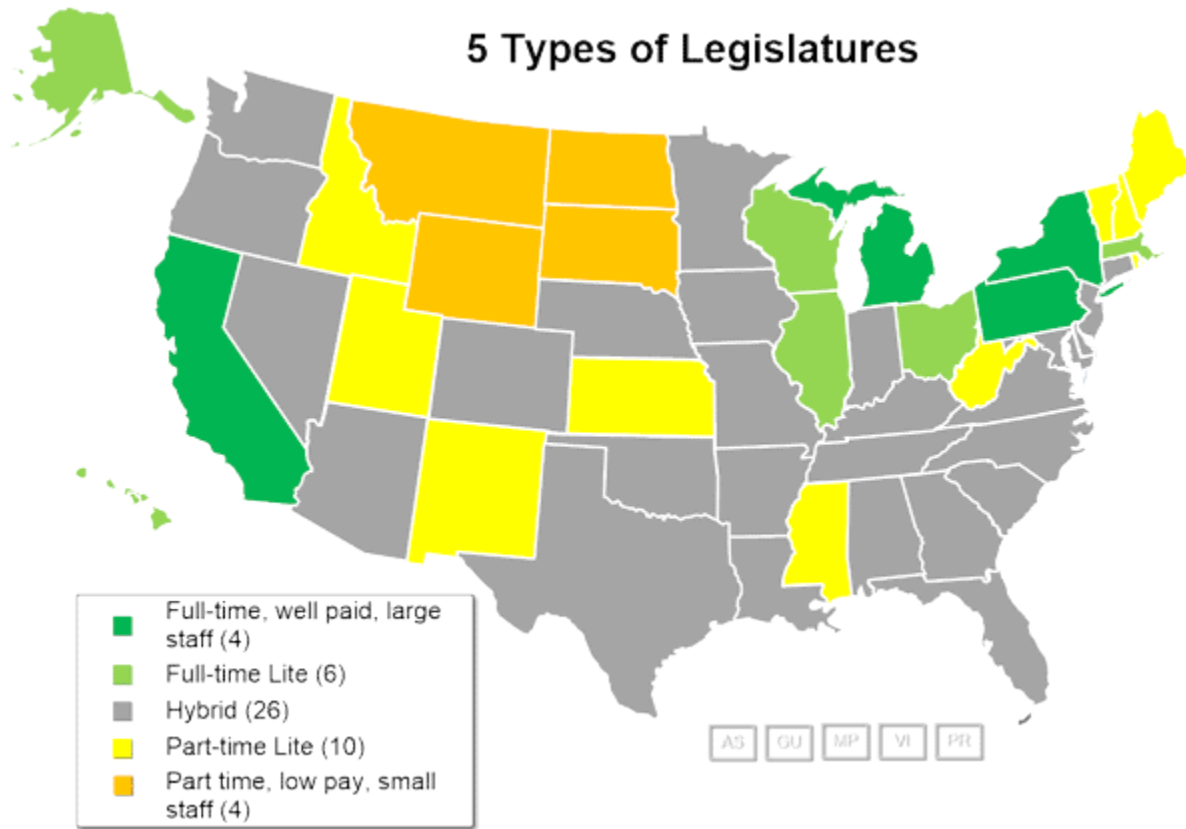
## Gray Legislatures (Hybrid)

Legislatures in the Gray category are hybrids. Legislatures in these states typically say that they spend more than two-thirds of a full time job being legislators. Although their income from legislative work is greater than that in the Gold states, it's usually not enough to allow them to make a living without having other sources of income. Legislatures in the Gray category have intermediate sized staff. States in the middle of the population range tend to have Gray legislatures.

## Gold Legislatures (Part-time, low pay, small staff)

In the Gold states, on average lawmakers spend the equivalent of half of a full-time job doing legislative work. The compensation they receive for this work is quite low and requires them to have other sources of income in order to make a living. The Gold states have relatively small staffs. They are often called traditional or citizen legislatures and they are most often found in the smallest population, more rural states. Again, NCSL has divided these states into two groups. The legislatures in Gold are the most traditional or citizen legislatures. The legislatures in Gold Lite are slightly less traditional. States are listed alphabetically within subcategories.

Table 1 shows the breakdown of states by category. Table 2 shows the average scores for the Green, Gray and Gold states for time on the job, compensation and staff size. For 2021 legislator compensation figures, take a look at the [latest figures](#).



**Table 1. Green, Gray and Gold Legislatures**

Green	Green Lite	Gray	Gold Lite	Gold
California	Alaska	Alabama	Idaho	Montana
		Arizona	Kansas	North Dakota
Michigan	Hawaii	Arkansas	Maine	South Dakota
New York	Illinois	Colorado	Mississippi	Wyoming
Pennsylvania	Massachusetts	Connecticut		
	Ohio	Delaware	New Hampshire	
	Wisconsin	Florida	New Mexico	
		Georgia	Rhode Island	
		Indiana	Utah	
		Iowa	Vermont	
		Kentucky	West Virginia	
		Louisiana		
		Maryland		
		Texas		
		Virginia		
		Washington		

Source: NCSL 2008

## Table 2. Average Job Time, Compensation and Staff Size by Category of Legislature

Category of Legislature	Time on the Job (1)	Compensation (2)	Total Staff (3)
Green	84%	\$82,358	1,250
Gray	74%	\$41,110	469
Gold	57%	\$18,449	160

**Notes:**

1. Estimated proportion of a full-time job spent on legislative work including time in session, constituent service, interim committee work, and election campaigns. *Source: 2014 NCSL survey of all state legislators.*
2. Estimated average annual compensation of legislators including salary, per diem, and any other unvouchered expense payments. *Source: NCSL 2014.*
3. Average number of staff--partisan and nonpartisan--working for the legislature. *Source: NCSL 2015.*