

# The Legislative Process in Massachusetts

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# Commonwealth of Massachusetts: Constitutional Officers, Legislative, Judicial

## Constitutional Officers—all 4-year terms

- Charlie Baker, Governor
- Karyn E. Polito, Lt. Governor
- William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth
- Deborah Goldberg, Treasurer and Receiver General
- Suzanne Bump, State Auditor
- Maura Healey, Attorney General
- Governor's Council (8)

# Legislature (The General Court)

Sept. 6, 2022 state primary, November 8, 2022 general election

## MA State Senate

**40 State Senators:** 2-year terms

**Karen Spilka,** Senate President

## MA House of Representatives

**160 State Representatives:** 2-year terms

**Ronald Mariano,** Speaker of the House

## Legislature (The General Court)

Formal Legislative Session: **January 6, 2021 - July 31, 2022**

Informal Legislative Session ends: **December 31, 2022**

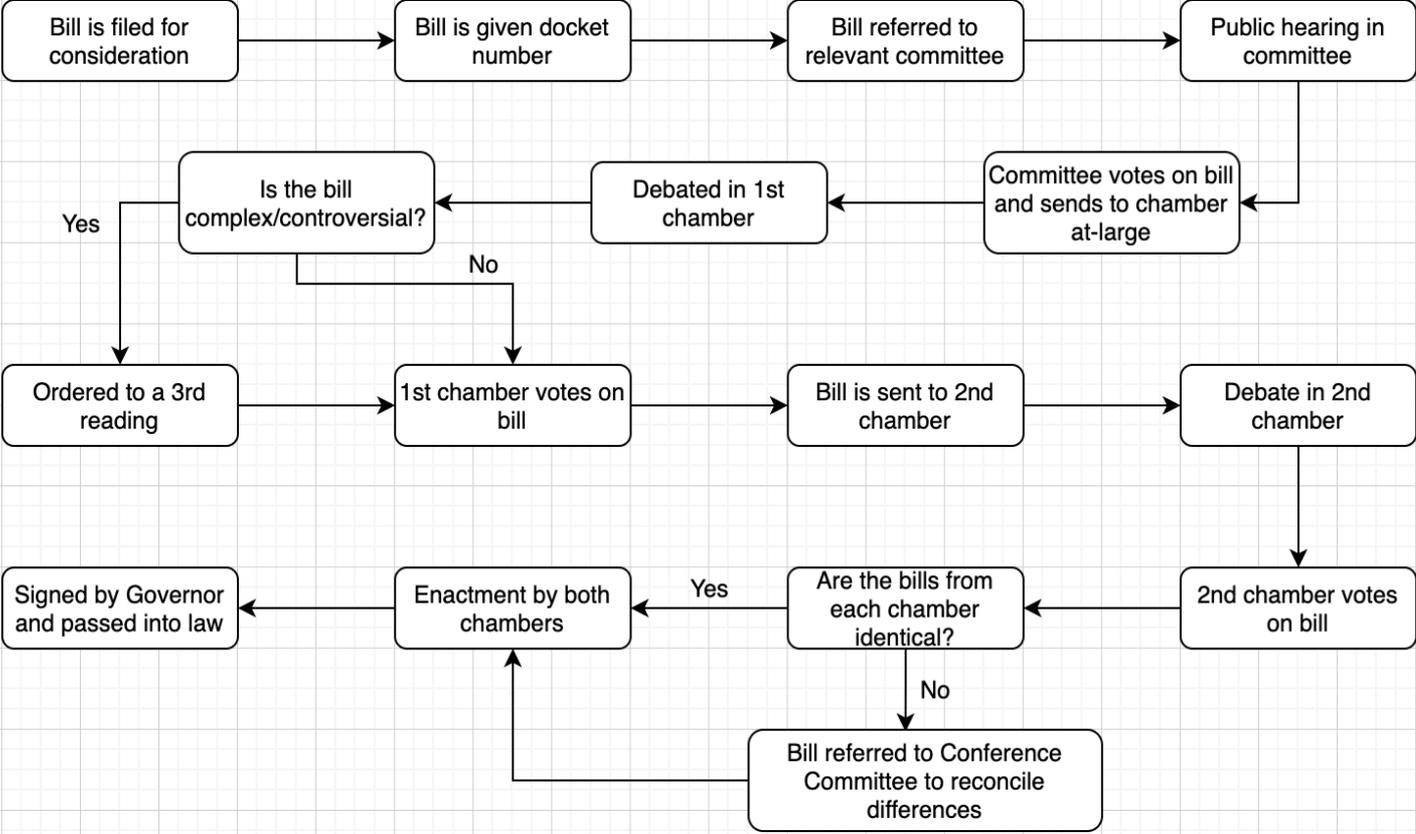
**7500** bills filed since January 2021

Public hearings began March/April 2021

**100** Acts (Session Laws) passed, signed into law in 2021 *as of*  
*12/2/2021*

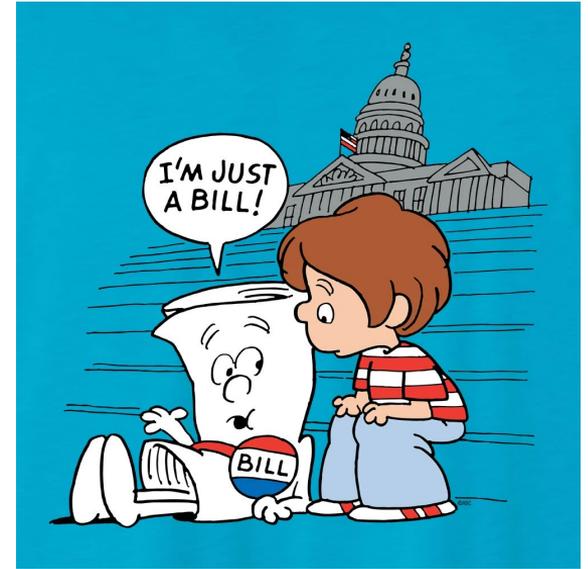
**386** Acts passed in 2020 by Legislature (Session Laws)

# How a Bill Becomes Law



# Filing

- The first step is filing the bill
- Bills can be filed by:
  - Legislators
  - At the request of citizens through a legislator
  - State agencies
  - Governor
  - Constitutional officers
- Bills filed by special interest groups may or may not identify the group when it is printed, depending on their desire to be associated with the bill
- Bills can be filed at any time during the 2-year legislative session, though most are filed before the 'filing deadline' on the 3rd Friday in January
- Bills may have one or more co-sponsors
- Legislators have 2 weeks after the 'filing deadline' to become a co-sponsor



# Numbering

## **SENATE . . . . . No. 2745**

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### *The Commonwealth of Massachusetts*

In the One Hundred and Ninety-First General Court  
(2019-2020)

- Ahead of the filing deadline, the bill is considered to be a ‘docket’ and is therefore given a ‘docket number’
- The House Clerk and Senate Clerk assign ‘docket numbers’ to bills filed from their respective chambers (HD or SD)
- Bills that originate in the House are begin with ‘H’ and those that originate in the Senate begin with ‘S’
  - Examples:
    - H.2745
    - S.2745

# Referral to Committee

- Committees are an essential part of the legislative process
- Membership allows elected officials to take a specialized look at policy issues
- Bills are usually referred to committees based on subject matter relevance
- House Committees
  - Only members from the House of Representatives
  - Ex.: House Committee on Ways and Means
- Senate Committees
  - Only members from the Senate
  - Ex.: Senate Committee on Redistricting
- Joint Committees
  - Members from both House of Representatives and Senate
  - Ex.: Joint Committee on Economic Development and Emerging Technologies

# Public Hearing

- Committees will schedule hearings by grouping bills of similar subject matter together
- Any individual is allowed to testify in support or opposition of any piece of legislation being considered
- Who testifies at a public hearings?
  - Lobbyists, state officials, activists, stakeholders, etc.
- Individuals are allowed to testify for usually 3 minutes maximum
- Detailed written testimony is often submitted to the committee

Hearing Details

## JOINT COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

Search the Legislature...

EVENT DETAILS

Status: Completed  
Event Date: Tuesday, November 9, 2021  
Start Time: 11:00 AM  
Location: [Virtual Hearing](#)

Event Description  
Inclusive & Equitable Economic Development

Members of the public are invited to participate in this virtual hearing via written or oral testimony. Written testimony may be submitted via email to [brendan.mccarthy@mahouse.gov](mailto:brendan.mccarthy@mahouse.gov) or [elizabeth.storms@masenate.gov](mailto:elizabeth.storms@masenate.gov)

Please include the bill number and "Testimony" in the subject line of the email.

Registration is REQUIRED for those wishing to

| Item Name                                                                    | Start Time         | Duration | Webcast | Download |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------|---------|----------|
| Joint Committee on Economic Development and Emerging Technologies - 11-09-21 | 11/9/2021 11:00 AM | 00:20:50 |         |          |



# Committee Reporting

- After a public hearing is over, a committee will either report favorably or unfavorably on each bill
  - Favorably: committee voted to advance the bill
  - Unfavorably: committee voted to kill the bill
- All bills must be reported out of committee by the 3rd Wednesday in March during the 2nd year of the 2-year legislative cycle
- 'Extension orders' are common and allow bills to remain in committee for a longer amount of time



# Debate

- After being reported out of committee, a bill undergoes the following steps in the chamber:
  - 1) First reading
  - 2) Placed in the orders of the day
  - 3) Second reading
  - 4) Debate
  - 5) Third reading
  - 6) Engrossment
- Engrossment is the formal reprinting of the bill in the form upon which the chamber will vote final passage.
- The chamber finally votes to either advance the bill to the next chamber or send it back to committee
- The same process takes once the bill arrives in the second chamber

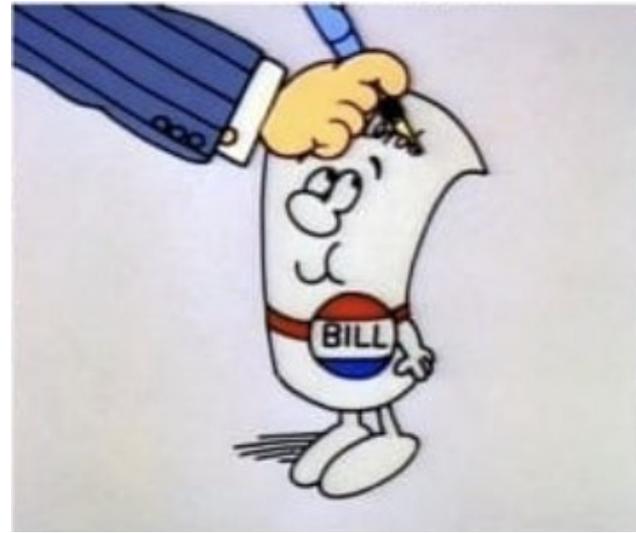


# Conference Committee

- If the bill is engrossed with differences between the House and Senate versions, a conference committee is formed to integrate the 2 bills
  - This happens with each budget passed by the Legislature, as well as many complex or controversial bills
- 3 members from both the House and Senate are appointed to the conference committee, with at least 1 member from the minority party from each chamber
- Conference committees can reconcile a bill's language over several weeks
- After a conference committee substitutes their integrated language into the bill, it cannot be further amended or changed

# Signed into Law

- Enactment:
  - 1) Enacted in the House
  - 2) Enacted in the Senate
  - 3) Signed by the Senate President
  - 4) Sent to the Governor's desk for a signature
- To pass the bill into law, the Governor will sign the bill
- If the Governor opposes the bill, they can:
  - Veto the bill (can be overridden by a  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority in the Legislature)
  - Veto the bill with recommended amendments
  - Allow the unsigned bill to become law
- Bills go into effect 90 days after being signed, but most are written to immediately go into effect upon enactment or have an emergency preamble



# What is a Session Law?

**Each bill that becomes law** is given a chapter number based on the chronological order in which it was adopted.

These chapters are called **Session Laws** and are compiled on an annual basis.

## **Most Session Laws are Acts.**

- Acts include everything from our fiscal year state budget (the General Appropriation Act) and major legislative initiatives to reorganize government agencies.
- Session Laws that are not codified into the Mass. General Laws are called Special Acts and include matters affecting an individual or a particular city or town.
- A Resolve is most often used when the legislation's only purpose is to establish a special commission to investigate a certain issue.

# How you can help

<https://malegislature.gov/search/findmylegislator>

## **When ACEC/MA sends a legislative alert about a bill:**

- Find out how to reach your State Senator and State Representative
- Send an email, Make a call
- Look for an opportunity to meet
- Let us know if they need more information
- Engineers & Land Surveyors Day

Questions?