

# 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**

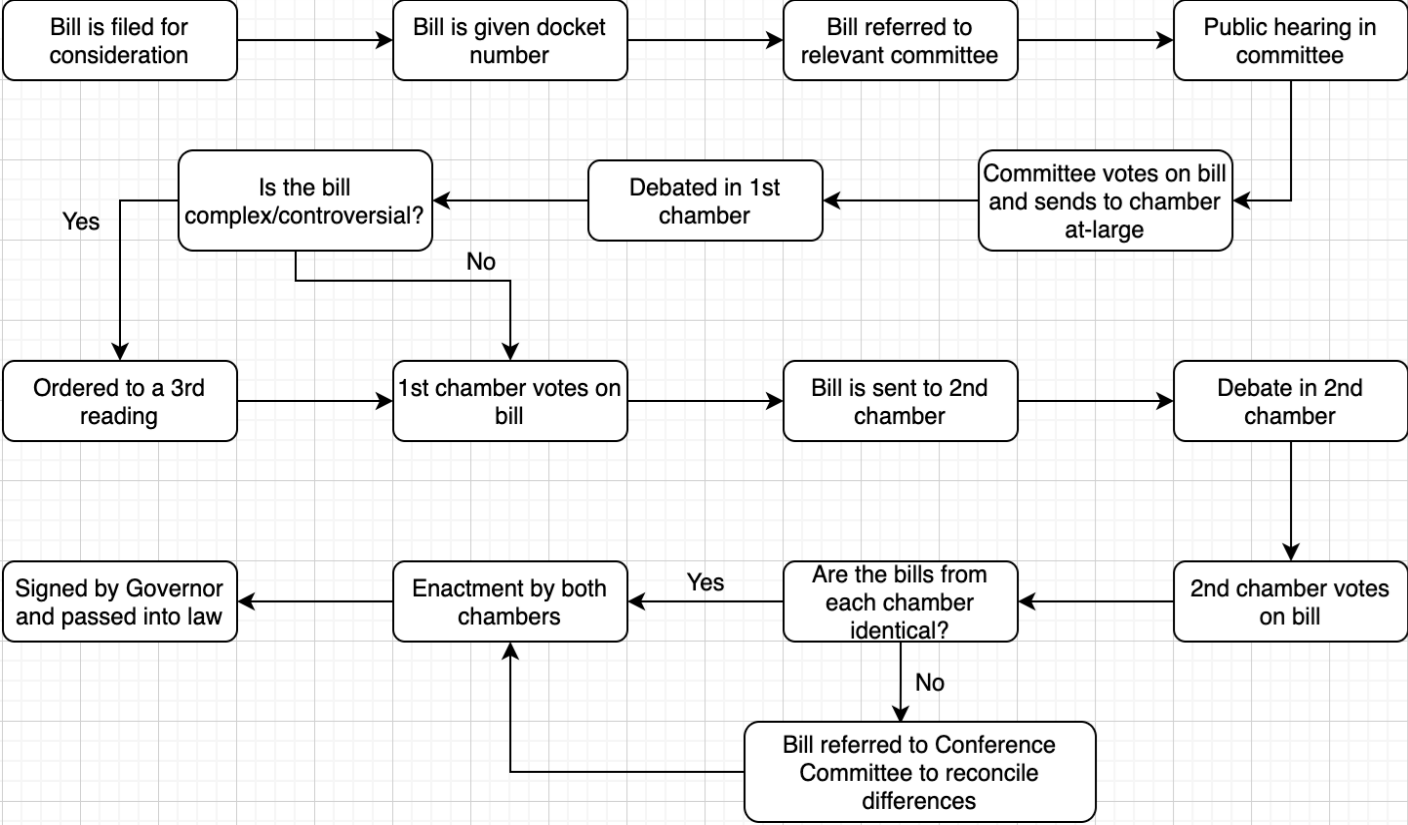
**7500** bills filed since January 2021

Public hearings began March/April 2021

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

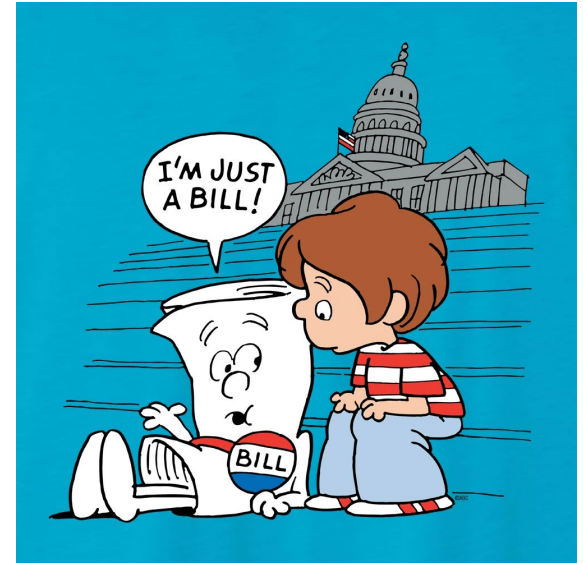
**386** Acts passed in 2020 by Legislature (Session Laws)

# 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.

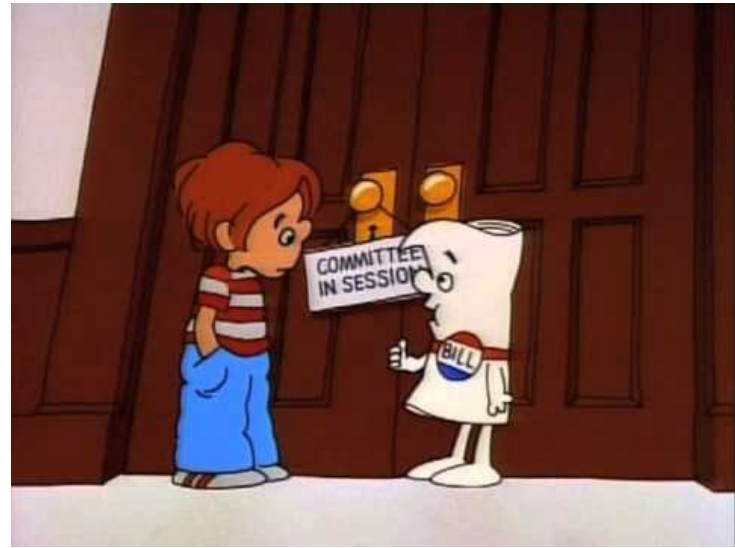
Registration is REQUIRED for those wishing to

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	<a href="#">▶</a>	<a href="#">⬇</a>



# 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

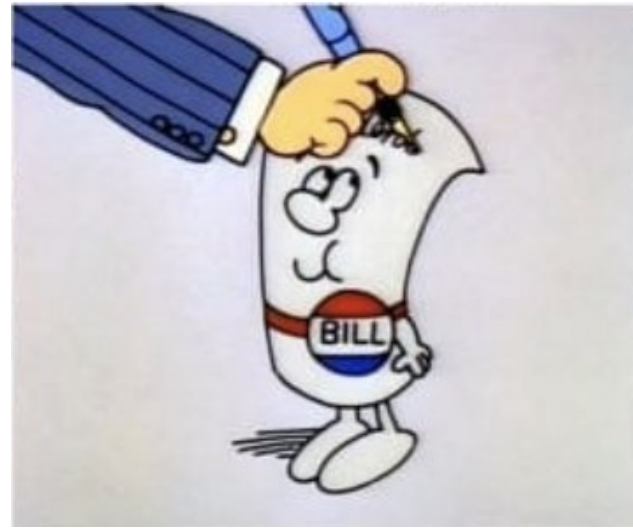


# Conference Committee

- 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?