

HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW IN MASSACHUSETTS



PETITION FILED WITH HOUSE OR SENATE CLERK

1. The committee report goes to the House or Senate Floor. An unfavorable report kills the bill...a favorable report is considered the **FIRST READING.**



THE CLERK GIVES THE BILL A NUMBER AND ASSIGNS IT TO A COMMITTEE

2. If the bill relates to finances it is referred to the Committee on Ways and Means. When this committee makes a report, it goes back to the floor for a **SECOND READING.**



THE COMMITTEE HOLDS A PUBLIC HEARING BEFORE MAKING ITS REPORT ON THE BILL.

3. On the House Floor, the bill may be debated and amended. If favorable action is taken, the bill is referred to the Committee on Bills in **THIRD READING.**

Following the Third Reading, a vote is taken on "Passing the Bill to be Engrossed."
A favorable vote sends the bill on to the other branch

Repeat: 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Reading and Vote steps in the Second Branch

If the bill passes in the Second Branch in an amended version, it is sent back to the First Branch for concurrence. If concurrence is rejected, the bill must go to the Conference Committee.

When agreement is reached on the final form of the bill by both branches of the Conference Committee, the bill is prepared for the final passage.

A vote on enactment is taken in the House and the Senate

THE BILL IS SENT TO THE GOVERNOR FOR ACTION

If the bill is not sent to the Governor for action within the two-year legislative session, it must be re-filed for the next session and go through the entire process again.

The Governor, during the ten-day period allowed under the Constitution, may either:

- Sign the Bill
- Veto the Bill
- Let it become law by taking no action
- Send it back for amendments.

The House and the Senate can override a veto by getting 2/3 of the House and Senate members to vote against the veto.



As a citizen of Massachusetts, you have a right of “free petition.” You can submit an idea for a law to a state representative or senator and they may file the petition for consideration by the General Court of Legislators.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

Every petition goes through four major checkpoints:

1. You or a group of citizens initiates the petition.
 2. Your representative or senator files the legislation.
 3. The General Court (Legislature) approves/disapproves it.
 4. The governor signs or vetoes the legislation.
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1. Initiating the petition

Do you have an idea that you would like to see become state law? Maybe you want a regulation for safety belts on school buses. The first thing to do is contact your representative or senator. Call (617) 722-2520 for the names of your representatives.

2. Filing the legislation

Your senator or representative now takes over. Petitions are filed with the House Clerk if sponsored by a representative and with the Senate Clerk if sponsored by a senator. The Clerk assigns a number to the petition to identify it and also decides which Joint Committee to send the petition to. School bus regulations, for instance, would go to the Public Safety Committee. This Joint Committee selects a public hearing date. This is when anyone may come to the State House to speak in favor of or against the legislation.

3. The General Court

If the Joint Committee gives an adverse recommendation after the hearing, the petition goes back to the branch that it originated in. If the adverse report is accepted, the petition is killed for the year. A favorable recommendation, however, means the petition is sent through three “Readings” in both the House and the Senate.

The **First Reading** is informal, as the petition merely appears in the journals of your legislator’s branch. It is during the **Second Reading** that the petition is first debated and discussed at length by the legislators. Amendments might also be introduced during the Second Reading.

The **Third Reading** puts the petition through more debate and, if necessary, more amendments. At the end of the Third Reading stage, the petition is first engrossed by both branches and printed on parchment paper, enacted, or passed by the House and the Senate, and then signed by their presiding officers: The Speaker of the House and the Senate President.

4. Signing the legislation into law

The last step occurs when the bill is laid upon the Governor’s desk. They have 10 days to act upon it.

- a) Sign it and it becomes a law (usually effective after 90 days).
- b) Return it for reconsideration with an Executive amendment.
- c) Veto it, requiring a 2/3 Legislative override to pass it over the veto.
- d) Refuse to sign it. After ten days it becomes law.
- e) Refuse to sign it. If session ends within the ten-day limit, it is automatically vetoed. This is called a “Pocket veto.”