

The Massachusetts Legislative Process

First Wednesday in January: The House and Senate convene for the beginning of the new session.

Third Friday of January: Deadline to file legislation. Bills can be filed later in the year, but after this date are called “late files.”



Bills are sent to one of the joint legislative committees. Public hearings are organized for each bill (usually between March and July). This is the bill’s “first reading.”



Finance related bills are sent to the House Ways and Means Committee for review.



Bills are sent to the House floor for debate, the bill’s “second reading.” Of one-fifth of House members present request a “roll call,” the vote is recorded. If not, a “voice vote” is taken.



House Committee on Bills in the Third Reading reviews the bills for technical correctness and constitutionality.



Bills are sent back to the House floor for debate. A voice vote or roll call follows the debate. If the majority votes in favor, the bill is passed by the House and the bill is “enrolled.”



This same process is repeated by the Senate.



Once the bill is enrolled in the Senate, a final vote of enactment is conducted by both the House and the Senate. However, if the Senate amends the House-enrolled bill and makes changes that House members object to, then a Conference Committee will be established of both House and Senate members to resolve differences between the two branches. The Conference Committee report cannot be further amended. Once the bill is enacted by both the House and the Senate, it is sent to the Governor’s desk.



The Governor has ten days to sign the bill into law. If they do not, the bill dies, unless both branches of the legislature override this veto by a two-thirds vote.

MASSACHUSETTS
Rivers Alliance



The Massachusetts legislature operates on a two-year session schedule.

Bills may begin in either the House or the Senate but must ultimately pass both branches before reaching the Governor’s desk.