The Legislative Process

An overview of how legislation moves through the Massachusetts House of Representatives

1 AN IDEA

An idea may come from a Representative, the Governor, a state agency, or a member of the public.

2 A PETITION IS FILED

A Representative files a petition for legislation with the Office of the Clerk of the House.

3 THE MATTER IS REFERRED

The Clerk processes the petition and assigns a House number. The House refers it to a joint committee, and the Senate concurs.

4 COMMITTEE REVIEW

The committee holds a public hearing and reports its recommendation on the bill to the House. Not every bill receives a favorable recommendation.

5 FIRST READING

A favorable committee report receives its first reading when it appears in the House Journal. The bill may be referred to a secondary committee before being scheduled for consideration.

6 SECOND READING

When scheduled, the bill is read a second time. The House considers committee-recommended amendments and votes whether to order the bill to a third reading.

7 THIRD READING

The bill is reviewed by the committee on Bills in the Third Reading. After release, it is read a third time, opened to amendments, and voted on for passage to be engrossed.

8 SENATE CONSIDERATION

The Senate may pass, amend, or reject the bill. If amended, it returns to the House. Both branches must agree on the same language. Differences may be resolved through concurrence or a committee of conference.

9 FINAL PASSAGE

The Engrossing Division prepares the bill, the House Clerk certifies it, the House enacts it, and it is sent to the Senate for its action.

10 THE GOVERNOR ACTS

The Senate Clerk lays the bill before the Governor. The Governor may sign it, allow it to become law without signature, veto it, or return it with recommendation of amendment.

IMPORTANT TERMS

Petition
A request filed by one or, in some instances, two legislators briefly describing the nature of the proposed legislation and the objects sought by it, signed by one or more petitioners, and accompanied by a draft of the bill, order, proposal, resolutions or resolve embodying the legislation proposed.

Bill
Document calling for a permanent change in law while under consideration prior to becoming an act.

Engrossed Bill or Resolve
Final version of a bill or resolve as passed to be engrossed by the House or Senate.

Enactment
Final passage of a bill, first by the House, then by the Senate.

Concurrence
Agreement by one branch with an action originating in the other branch.

This overview is a general educational guide prepared by the Office of the Clerk of the House. The Constitution, House Rules, Joint Rules, and precedent govern particular matters.

malegislature.gov/ClerksOffice/House