How Bills Become Law in Massachusetts

Presented by Autistic House
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A state representative or state senator turns an idea into a bill, and files the bill in the House or Senate.

The bill gets a number.

H-1370
S-89

The bill was filed in the House and the Senate.

But, in Massachusetts, any citizen can ask the state rep. or senator to file a bill—so the idea can also come from you!

Becoming a Bill

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Organize with your friends and other groups in your community who care about your bill, and turn up in numbers! You can testify in small groups.

A bill’s beginning

Then the bill is sent to a committee based on its topic. S-89 is about aversive treatment for people with disabilities, so it went to the committee on “children, families, and persons with disabilities.”

After the bill’s hearing, the committee will decide what to do next:

1. Favorable report “ought to pass”
2. Unfavorable report “ought not to pass”
3. Sent for “study” (kills bill)

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After a bill is reported out from committee, it goes through three "readings."

**First Reading:**
- The clerk of the House or Senate reports the committee's decision.
- The bill goes to committee on steering and policy. (Except some bills involving money, which go to ways and means first.)
- If the House votes for the bill, it proceeds to the other side to repeat the three readings process.
- If the two versions are different, a conference committee will try to reconcile.
- If the bill passes, then it goes to the other side to repeat the three readings process.
- If enacted...
- The bill goes to the governor.
- The governor can:
  1. Sign the bill into law.
  2. Let the bill become law without signing it.
  3. Send it back to the statehouse and ask for changes.
  4. Veto the bill.

**Second Reading:**
- House or Senate must vote to send bill to third reading.
- Once released from steering and policy, the bill begins its second reading, in front of the entire House or Senate. The state reps & senators can debate the bill and suggest changes, known as amendments.

**Third Reading:**
- The committee on bills in third reading, which checks to make sure the bill is totally legally correct. When they're done, it goes back to the whole house or Senate for a last reading. It can still be changed.
- After final debate on any amendments, the House or Senate votes to "pass the bill to be engrossed."
- If the governor signs the bill, it becomes law. (To pass, the House & Senate must each vote yes by 2/3.)
- If no or vetoed, kill the bill in a pocket veto, by not signing it and waiting for session to end.