

Demystifying the Legislative Process

A Guide for MASC Members

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The Importance of Advocacy for School Committees

- Proactive advocacy enables school committees to be agents of positive change.
- Allows us to shape an educational landscape that is: well-funded, equitable, and responsive to the needs of students and educators alike.
- School committees help create a foundation for a strong educational system that prepares students for success in a rapidly changing world.

Key Milestones in the Annual Budget Cycle

- **January:** Governor's Budget Proposal submitted by the 4th Wednesday in January (or within five weeks of inauguration).
- **March – April:** House Ways and Means drafts and amends the budget. House vote by late April.
- **May:** Senate Ways and Means reviews and amends. Senate vote by late May.
- **June:** Conference Committee reconciles House and Senate versions. Final budget sent to Governor for approval.
- **July:** Governor signs, vetoes, or amends items. Legislature can override vetoes with a two-thirds vote.
- **July 1:** Fiscal Year begins, temporary budgets may be enacted if not finalized.

Your Legislators **CAN** Get Earmarks (Sometimes)

- After the House and Senate Budget are filed, legislators can file earmarks to their respective budgets
- This can include funding for specific initiatives or actually policy changes
- Contact your legislators ahead of time to make sure your district gets what it needs!

Massachusetts Legislative Process Overview

- Bicameral Legislature:
 - Senate – 40 Members, roughly 180,000 residents per district
 - House – 160 Members, roughly 40,000 residents per district
- Biennial Sessions: Every 2 years, starting in January (odd-numbered years).
- Key Steps: Filing bills, committee review, floor votes, and governor approval.

Key Milestones in the Legislative Cycle

- **January (odd years):** Legislative session begins.
- **Third Friday in January of the first year** of a legislative session: Bill Filing deadline (Example – January 17, 2025).
- **Mid January – Mid June:** Bills get assigned bill numbers and are sorted into committees.
- **Late February - June:** Committee hearings on bills.
- **First Wednesday in February (even years):** “Joint Rule 10 Day” is the deadline for joint committees to report on bills referred to them.
- **July 31 (even years):** Formal sessions end.

Filing a Bill & Committee Hearings

- Bills filed after the filing deadline are called "late files" and require special approval from the Legislature to be considered.
- Committees hold public hearings beginning in February through June of each year – the public can testify to support or oppose bills.
- Possible outcomes:
 - Favorable Report (ought to pass): The bill moves forward.
 - Adverse Report (ought not to pass): The bill is effectively killed.
 - Study Order: Used to delay or quietly kill a bill, indicating it needs further research.

Key Committees for MASC Members

- Education Committee: Reviews K-12 policies.
- Ways and Means Committee: Manages budget and school funding issues.
- Testify and influence outcomes in these committees.
- Current Chairs / Vice Chairs of the Education Committee:
 - Senator Jason Lewis (Winchester)
 - Rep. Denise Garlick (Needham)
 - Senator Sal DiDomenico (Everett)
 - Rep. Steven Ultrino (Malden)

The Three-Reading Process

- First Reading: Bill introduced, no debate.
- Second Reading: Debate and amendments.
- Third Reading: Legal review and vote for approval.
- Both Senate and House must pass identical versions.

The Governor's Role in Lawmaking

- Options: Sign, veto, propose amendments, or do nothing (becomes law in 10 days).
- Veto Override: Legislature can override with a two-thirds majority vote.
- MASC members should remain engaged through the governor's decision.

A Ballot Question Passed... Now What?

- Implementation Timeline: Effective date depends on question; may need additional time for regulatory setup.
- Legislative Intervention: Legislature can amend or repeal, though this is rare.
- Administrative Action: Relevant state agencies oversee and enforce new law (e.g., Department of Education, Public Health).
- Judicial Review: Courts may review if there are legal challenges; potential for delay.

What is Lobbying?

- Lobbying is influencing legislators to pass or oppose legislation.
- School committees can advocate for their priorities through direct lobbying.
- Effective lobbying helps shape education policy at the state level.

Know Your Representatives & Committees (and their staff)

- Research your legislators' positions on education issues.
- Build relationships with key legislators, especially on the Education and Ways and Means committees.
- Tailor messages to legislators' districts.
- Always respect the staff and build rapport with them.

Developing a Clear Message

- Be Specific: Focus on clear asks (e.g., funding, policy changes).
- Use data and examples from your district to strengthen your case.
- Keep messages brief, clear, and relevant to legislators' concerns.

The MASC Delegate Assembly

- Held every year at the annual conference (this Friday!)
- Considers member-submitted resolutions that shape MASC's legislative agenda and organizational priorities.
- Items this year include:
 - Increasing the Compulsory Attendance Age
 - School Bus Stop Arm Surveillance
 - Support of Legislation to Improve the Fiscal Health of Rural Districts
 - Fully adjusting Chapter 70 Aid for Inflation

MASC Funding Priorities

- Full Funding for the Student Opportunity Act: Ensure commitments to Chapter 70, charter school mitigation, and special education funding.
- Full Funding for Special Education Circuit Breaker: Advocate for a higher reimbursement rate.
- Support for Small and Rural Districts: Earmark funds for regions with declining enrollment.
- Massachusetts School Building Authority Support: Request lifting funding caps for construction and repair projects.

Local Control & the Future of Education

- Retain Community Oversight: Protect local governance of public schools.
- Evaluating Authority of Elected Committees: Uphold the authority of school committees over superintendent evaluations.
- Incentives for Future Educators: Develop programs to attract and retain teachers.
- Higher Education Partnerships: Encourage better teacher preparation programs.

MASC Day on the Hill

- Annual Lobbying Day for MASC (April 15, 2025)
- Members from across MA join us to advocate for our shared priorities
- Top 3 priorities during 2024 cycle included:
 - Adjusting the Chapter 70 Inflation Index to the Full Cap of 4.5%
 - Fully funding the Student Opportunity Act and the Special Education Circuit Breaker
 - Establishing a \$100 per-pupil minimum increment as a base number for future years

How to Be Active in the Legislative Process: Use the MA Legislature Website

- Access Legislative Info: View bills, resolutions, and schedules.
- Find Your Legislators: Locate contact details and committee assignments.
- Research History: Access records of past legislation and voting.
- Public Hearings: Check schedules and access meeting agendas.
- Advocacy Resources: Tips for effective lobbying and participation.
- Legislative Services: Find resources for education, healthcare, and public safety.
- Stay Updated: Receive news and alerts on legislative matters.

Follow-Up and Stay Engaged

- Testify at hearings for bills affecting education.
- Send thank-you notes after meetings with legislators.
- Monitor where the bill is in the process and stay in touch.
- Keep long-term relationships with legislators for future advocacy.
- Advocacy takes time – bills take years/multiple sessions to pass.
- Continue re-filing bills and advocating for long-term goals (e.g., education funding reform).

Questions and Discussion

Thank you for joining us – contact us anytime

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