

Massachusetts Legislative Glossary

A

Act: A bill passed by the legislature, signed into law by the governor (or passed over his/her veto), thus becoming law.

Acts and Resolves: A compilation of the bills and resolves enacted and passed by the legislature and signed by the governor. The Acts and Resolves are bound in a volume on a yearly basis.

AD HOC Committee: A committee formed for some special purpose. The committee automatically dissolves upon the completion of the specified task.

Adjourn: To end daily session.

Adoption: The question on matters relating directly to the legislative body requiring only one vote; for example, orders, resolutions, amendments, and motions.

Adverse Report: A committee recommendation that a matter "ought not to pass".

After vote: (AV) The House is allowed five minutes after a Roll Call Vote is taken for a Representative to add his/her vote. This after vote is not counted in the official tally, but is recorded as an AV in the printed Yeas and Nays.

Amendment: Change, addition or deletion in the wording of a Bill under consideration either in Committee or in Chamber. (See also Second Reading and Third Reading)

Appeal the Decision of the Chair: A parliamentary procedure for a legislator to challenge the decision of the presiding officer.

Approved by the Governor: The signature of the Governor on an engrossed enacted Bill. The Bill becomes law in ninety days unless there is an Emergency Preamble.

B

Bill: Document which proposes a change in existing statutes and/or introduces a new statute. The bill accompanies the Petition. Bills are bound in the Legislative Documents volumes in the State Library.

By request: This phrase, found after the name of a legislator in the sponsor section on the top of a printed Bill, indicates that the legislator does not endorse the Bill which s/he introduced as the result of the right of Free Petition.

C

CMR: See Code of Massachusetts Regulations

Calendar: Also called the Orders of the Day (O.D.), the calendar is the daily agenda of the House and Senate.

Caucus: Meeting of legislators of the same political party to decide policy and course of action.

Chambers: The two meeting places of the House and Senate where the formal business of the day is conducted. Chamber galleries are open to the public.

Chapter Number: Number assigned to a law once it has been signed by the Governor.

Code of Massachusetts Regulations (CMR): These published regulations are created and enforced by Executive Branch Agencies, (given authority by the legislature to create and enforce), though not all Agencies have published their regulations.

Committee: Consists of members of the House and Senate (Joint Committees) or House or Senate members only (Standing Committees). Joint committees study and research Bills under their consideration, hold public hearings and report on Bills. (See also Committee report)

Committee on Bills in Third Reading: Committee empowered to examine and correct bills and resolves to avoid repetitions and unconstitutional provisions, and to insure accuracy and consistency with existing statutes. Matters are automatically referred to this committee when ordered to a Third Reading.

Committee report: The report is not a written document but the recommendation of a Committee that a bill ought to pass (OTP), ought not to pass (ONTP), or ought to pass with an amendment (OTPWA).

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

Conference Committee: A small special committee appointed by the leadership to iron out differences between the House and Senate versions of a Bill. Three members of each branch make up the committee. Their report must either be accepted or rejected, it cannot be amended.

Constitutional Convention: Meeting of the Senate and House of Representatives in the House Chamber to consider and vote on proposed constitutional amendments. The procedure is governed by special rules adopted by both branches.

D

Daily List: List of committee hearings giving the committee, its matters, and the time and room number of each hearing.

Debate: Formal discussion on a matter before the body.

Docket Book: A book located in the clerk's office which lists all the legislation filed in any one legislative year.

E

Emergency Preamble: Means by which a Bill becomes a law upon the signature of the Governor instead of the usual ninety-day waiting period. (See also Approved by the Governor)

Enactment: Final approval of an Engrossed Bill by both branches. Enacted Bills are sent to the Governor by the Senate. (See also Engrossment)

Engrossed Bills or Resolves: Bills and resolves which are before the House and the Senate for final action, having been certified by the clerk to be rightly and truly prepared for final passage.

Engrossment: (Eng.) After passage by both branches the Bill is passed to be engrossed. Engrossment is the procedure whereby the Bill is typed in simulated script on special paper in the Engrossing Division. The engrossed Bill is voted upon for enactment. (See also Enactment)

Executive Session: A meeting of committee members held after a hearing to review public testimony and discuss the merits of the bill before making recommendations to the full membership of the House or Senate. Open to the public.

F

Favorable Report: A committee recommendation that a matter "ought to pass". A matter takes its first reading at this time.

Filibuster: A deliberate obstruction of the legislative process by making a long speech.

Filing Date: Petitions and their accompanying Bills or Resolves for the next session must be filed with the Clerk of the House or Senate on or before the first Wednesday in November in non-election years (odd numbered years), and on or before the first Wednesday in December during election years (even-numbered years). (See also Late Filed Bills)

First Reading: This is the first of three mandatory readings in each branch of the General Court. This reading is the account of the Committee Report delivered by the Clerk of the House or Senate. (See also Second Reading and Third Reading)

Formal Session: Meeting to consider and act upon reports of committees, messages from the Governor, petitions, orders, enactments, papers from the other branch, matters in the Orders of the Day, and various other matters which may be controversial in nature and during which roll call votes may be taken.

Free petition: In Massachusetts all citizens have the right to petition the state legislature. This procedure is called the right of free petition. A citizen drafts and files a Petition and accompanying Bill. A legislator sponsors the Bill in the General Court. If a legislator disagrees

with the contents of the Bill, he/she may indicate this by placing the phrase “By request” after his/her name.

G

General Court: The official name for the Massachusetts legislature, usually used when referring to both branches. It is also sometimes called the Great and General Court.

General Laws: Permanent in nature and applicable to the entire Commonwealth or to the state government.

Germaneness: The relevance or appropriateness of amendments or debate to the subject matter under discussion.

Governor's Message: The manner in which the Governor may introduce his/her proposals for legislation. The message is written in letter format to the General Court, and the Bill accompanies the message. These documents are assigned one Bill number and are also contained within the Bills in the Legislative Documents volumes in the State Library.

Grandfather Clause: A provision in a bill which exempts persons presently practicing or involved in the legislatively restricted activity from the provisions of the statute.

H

Hearing: A formal meeting of a committee at which testimony is presented.

Home Rule Petition: Legislation filed to address the needs of a particular municipality or at the request of, and with the approval of, that municipality and which does not affect generally the laws of Massachusetts.

I

Informal Sessions: Meeting designated by the Speaker of the House and the Senate President to consider reports of committees, papers from the other branch, amendments, matters in the Orders of the Day, and various other matters which are of a non-controversial nature. Any session may be declared an informal session with prior notice given, or in cases of an emergency.

Initiative Petition: Request by ten voters to submit a constitutional amendment or law to the people for approval or rejection. The petition is introduced into the General Court if signed by a number of citizens equaling three percent of the entire vote for governor in the preceding gubernatorial election. If a proposed initiative law fails to pass the General Court, additional signatures are required to place it on the ballot. A proposed initiative constitutional amendment, approved by at least one-fourth of the General Court, sitting in joint sessions by two consecutively elected General Courts can be placed on the ballot.

Interim: The period from adjournment of one regular legislative session to the commencement of the next legislative session.

J

Joint Committee: A joint committee is composed of members of both branches of the legislature; once a bill is recommended for passage by a joint committee and passes the House where it originated, it may immediately be placed on the Calendar in the House. A list of the current joint committees can be found on the [legislature's website](#).

Joint Rules: Rules for the governing of both the House and Senate, adopted by members of both bodies.

Joint Rule 10: Rule ordering that all matters referred to Joint Committees be reported out of committees by the fourth Wednesday in April. If the matter is referred to committee after April 15, it must be reported out within ten days, excluding Sundays and Holidays.

Joint Rule 33: Rule allowing the alteration, suspension or rescission of Joint Rules by a concurrent 2/3 vote of members present and voting. Some rules are suspended only by a 4/5 vote and a very few by unanimous consent.

Journals: The Journals of the House and Journals of the Senate are the official account of the daily sessions of the General Court. The Journals contain the procedural information of the process of legislative events. The Journals do not contain debate.

L

Late Filed Bill: A Bill which is filed after the Filing Date with the Clerk of the House or Senate, and approved by 4/5 of the members of the branch where the bill is introduced.

Lay on the Table: Motion to lay aside consideration of any bill, resolve, report, amendment or motion. If laid on the table, consideration is postponed until a subsequent motion taking the item off the table succeeds. A motion to lay on the table may be made in the Senate only.

Leadership: The President, Majority Leader, and Minority Leader of the Senate, and their assistants, and the Speaker, Majority Leader, Minority Leader of the House, and their assistants.

Legislative Bulletin on Committee Work: A listing of all matters and the committees to which they are assigned. A short description of each matter, its number, hearing date and committee report can also be found here.

Legislative Documents: The bound volumes of the Bills, Resolves, Governor's Messages, and other legislative documents.

Legislative Record: Numerical listing of all numbered matters filed for consideration by the General Court. Includes a brief description of the matter and its full legislative history.

N

Negatived: The rejection by the members of the General Court of a motion by a negative vote. (See also Roll Call Vote)

No Objection: Without objection by any member, the Senate or House may proceed to business as under suspension of rules, etc. Also known as Unanimous Consent.

O

Order: Temporary in nature and used for many purposes: setting up investigative committees (as distinguished from commissions), changes in rules and other parliamentary uses. Formal motion in writing.

Orders of the Day: Calendar of matters to be considered by the Senate or the House of Representatives.

Override: To overturn the Governor's veto by a 2/3 vote of the members present in both the House and the Senate.

P

Paired votes: Two Senators may combine or pair a negative vote with a positive vote, and therefore cancel each other out. One Senator must be present for the actual vote, and paired votes are not counted as part of the official tally. (See also Yeas and Nays and Roll Call Vote)

Pass: A legislator desiring to debate a particular item on the Calendar calls out "Pass" when the item is read by the Clerk. After disposing of all non-controversial items, the "Passed" items are taken up by the legislative body.

Passing Bill to be Enacted: The engrossed Bill (or Resolve) is read by title by the President or Speaker prior to his/her endorsement. The Bill then is transmitted to the Governor by the Clerk of the Senate.

Passing Bill to be Engrossed: Final action by House and Senate prior to enactment.

Petition: Formal document to request consideration of a proposal to the legislature. The proposal, usually a Bill or a Resolve, accompanies the petition.

Pocket Veto: If, after the General Court has Prorogued the Governor fails to sign any Enacted Bills or Resolves on his/her desk within ten days they do not become law. This lack of signature by the Governor is called a pocket veto. (See also Enactment and Prorogation)

Point of Order: Challenge to breach of order or rule.

Prevailed: The acceptance of a motion by the members of the General Court by a positive vote. (See also Roll Call Vote)

Proposal: Document accompanying a petition introducing legislative amendments to the Constitution of the Commonwealth.

Prorogation: The formal adjournment of the yearly session of the legislature by the Governor. If the General Court is not prorogued before the first Wednesday of January (the first day of the new session) the ending session is automatically dissolved at midnight on the Tuesday before the first Wednesday of January.

Public hearings: Forum for discussion and testimony by the public to the Committee which is considering a Bill. No transcripts of hearings are kept.

Q

Question or Personal Privilege: Questions affecting the rights, reputations and conduct of members.

Quorum: The number of members needed to conduct the sessions. A Roll Call Vote may be called if there is a request to determine if a quorum is present.

R

Recess: A temporary delay in proceedings that can vary in duration (minutes, hours, days, and weeks).

Recommittal: Sending a bill back to the committee that reported it out for consideration.

Reconsideration: Any member may move to reconsider a vote on any matter. If reconsideration prevails, the matter is voted on again.

Redraft: New version of a Bill which shows substantial changes. Redrafts have different Bill numbers from the original Bill. (See also Reprint)

Referendum Petition: A petition signed by a specified number of voters to repeal a law enacted by the legislators, and requesting that the legislation be suspended until the vote is taken.

Refile: A petition similar to one which was presented to the General Court in a previous year.

Reprint: Corrected copy of a Bill which shows the changes in a Bill which are of an editorial nature. Corrected reprints have the same Bill number as the original. (See also Redraft)

Reporting Date: The date, the last Wednesday in April, on which all Bills must be reported out of Joint Committees. This rule may be suspended to extend the reporting date. (See also Suspension of Rules)

Report of a Committee: Recommendation of the committee to which the matter has been referred.

Resolve: A document which requests an action of a less general nature than a Bill, such as the creation of a special commission. Petition must accompany the resolve, as with a Bill.

Resolution: Statement of the House or Senate or both branches together on a particular topic or event of concern to them. The titles of resolutions are found in the Journals.

Right of Free Petition: The right of every citizen of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to petition the General Court for legislation on any subject.

Roll Call Vote: A recorded vote of the House or Senate, also called Yeas and Nays. All other votes are unrecorded voice votes.

S

Second reading: At this time the floor of the chamber is opened for discussion and debate on the merits of a Bill. Amendments frequently occur during this time. A favorable vote is needed to send the bill to its Third Reading. (See also First Reading and Third Reading)

Session: The period during which the legislature meets and carries on its business.

Session Law: A law passed within a legislative session. They are numbered in the order they are passed.

Special Act/Special Law: Legislative act applying to a particular county, city, town or district, individual or group of individuals, or to a specific period of time (i.e. not general in nature).

Standing Committees: Committees which are comprised of House or Senate members only. A list current [House](#) and [Senate](#) committees is available on the legislature's website.

Study Order: Means by which Bills are sent back to the Joint Committees for further investigation and study. (See also Bill and Committee)

Substitution: Procedure by which an adverse report of a committee is overturned. Technically, the Bill is substituted for the adverse report, reviving the legislation.

Suspension of Rules: The procedural rules of the House and Senate may be suspended by the members in order to expedite the daily business.

T

Third reading: After a vote of approval for the Bill's second reading it is sent to the Bills in Third Reading Committee to be reviewed. This Committee checks the contents of the Bill for legal technicalities and proper citations. After the Bill is released by the Bills in Third Reading

Committee it is read for the third and final time in Chamber where it may again be debated and Amended. (See also First Reading and Second Reading)

U

Unanimous Consent: This occurs when no member objects to suspension of the rules so that action may take place which is otherwise prohibited.

V

Veto: The action of the Governor in disapproval of a measure. It includes a statement of the reasons why the Governor has not approved the measure and is sent to the chamber from which the bill originated.

Voice Vote: Oral expression of the members when a question is submitted for their determination. Response is given by "ayes" and "nays", and the presiding officer states his decision as to which side prevails.

Y

Yeas and Nays: The Roll Call Votes of the members of the House and Senate. Roll Calls for the Senate are found in the Journals of the Senate on the day on which the vote was taken. Roll Calls of the House are assigned a Yea and Nay Supplement number and are printed separately. When the bound volumes of the House Journals are printed the Yeas and Nays are included in the last volume at the end of the book.

Yield: To relinquish the floor to allow another member to speak or ask a question. Only allowed in the House of Representatives.