



## How laws are made in Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Legislature makes our state laws. Its official name is the General Court. It is made up of the House of Representatives (160 members) and the Senate (40 members). It meets for two-year sessions. We are currently in the 2009 - 2010 session. The Legislature's website is [www.mass.gov/legis](http://www.mass.gov/legis).

This chart shows the basic steps for how a "bill" (a proposed law) becomes a law. It is a complicated process. A bill can die at many steps along the way. Thousands of bills are filed each session but usually only several hundred become law.

<b>Step 1: Bill is filed</b>	Any legislator or the governor can file a bill. If a member of the House files the bill, it will be given a number such as "H. 123." If a member of the Senate files the bill, it will be given a number such as "S. 123." You can look up most bills on the legislature's website.
<b>Step 2: Bill goes to a committee</b>	Most bills about criminal justice issues go to the Judiciary Committee. It is made up of six senators and 11 representatives. There are two co-chairs – one senator and one representative. See FAMM's flyer on the Judiciary Committee for a list of members.
<b>Step 3: Committee hearing</b>	The committee holds a public hearing on each bill. Usually many bills are scheduled for the same hearing. Anyone can attend the hearing, testify for or against a bill, or submit written information about their views on a bill.
<b>Step 4: Committee decision</b>	<p>The committee decides what to do with each bill.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● If the committee agrees with the bill, it gives it a "favorable report." The bill moves to the next step.</li> <li>● If the committee disagrees with a bill, it can give it an "unfavorable report," which usually kills the bill.</li> <li>● Sometimes a bill is sent to a "study committee" for further consideration. In most cases, this ends up killing the bill.</li> <li>● The committee can also write its own bill by redrafting other bills that were filed.</li> </ul>

<b>Step 5: Further committee(s) review</b>	After a bill is reported favorably out of the Judiciary Committee, it will be reviewed by other committees. For example, bills that require public funding are sent to either the House or Senate Ways and Means Committee. Before a bill can be considered by the full House, it must be reviewed by the House Committee on Steering, Policy and Scheduling. Before a bill can be considered by the full Senate, it must be reviewed by the Senate Committee on Ethics and Rules. Many bills die during the committee review process.
	<i>Either Step 6 or Step 7 can happen next. The order doesn't matter, as long as both the House and Senate pass the bill.</i>
<b>Step 6: House considers bill</b>	The House of Representatives can make changes to a bill, called "amendments." The House must approve a bill twice before it can advance. If the House passes the bill first, it moves on to the Senate. If not, the bill dies for that session.
<b>Step 7: Senate considers bill</b>	The Senate can also make changes to the bill. Like the House, the Senate must also approve a bill twice. If not, the bill dies.
<b>Step 8: Conference committee</b>	If the House and Senate pass different versions of the bill, then six members from each body meet to work out an agreed upon version. The compromise version must then be approved as is by both the House and Senate. If not, the bill dies.
<b>Step 9: Bill sent to Governor</b>	The governor has 10 days to approve the bill and sign it into law. If he signs it, the bill becomes law. If the governor doesn't agree with the bill, he can send it back to the legislature with amendments or he can "veto" (reject) the bill. If the governor takes no action, the bill becomes law after 10 days.
<b>Step 10: If needed, bill goes back to legislature</b>	The legislature can vote to approve or reject the governor's amendments and send the bill back to the governor. The governor can then sign or veto the bill. The legislature can override a governor's veto by a vote of two-thirds of the members of both the House and Senate. The bill then becomes law.

### **Take part in the legislative process! Get involved!**

- Find out who your state legislators are. Go to [www.wheredoivotema.com](http://www.wheredoivotema.com) or call the Secretary of State's Citizen Information Service at (617) 727-7030.
- Attend public hearings on bills. Give testimony or give the committee your views in writing.
- Visit, call or write your legislators to ask them to work for or against a bill.
- Anyone can attend a House or Senate session to watch the debate. You can also watch sessions online at [http://masslegislature.tv/?l=hse\\_video](http://masslegislature.tv/?l=hse_video).

**FAMM can give you more information on how to play a role.**  
 Contact FAMM's Massachusetts Project at (617) 543-0878 or [bdougan@famm.org](mailto:bdougan@famm.org).