

DEMOCRACY IN DECLINE: DENIAL AND DELAY

Coalition to Reform Our Legislature

malegreform.org

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Introduction

What follows is a review of the performance of the Massachusetts State Legislature in the four years since the publication of *Democracy in Decline* (DID) in November 2021. It begins with a brief history of the movement towards reform which DID, in part, spurred: the formation of the Coalition to Reform Our Legislature (CROL), the heightened attention of the press and awareness by the public of the problem, and the State Auditor's efforts, still barren, to audit the legislature. It then assesses how the climate for reform has changed and whether and how the legislature has responded.

Prologue

The Formation of the Coalition to Reform Our Democracy: History and Initiatives

Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts (PDM) convened a Legislative Reform Working Group (LRWG) in late 2020 to assess the Massachusetts legislature's many reported deficiencies and to investigate the reasons underlying those deficiencies. Participants in that work extended beyond PDM's membership to activists and concerned citizens affiliated with a variety of groups. In November, 2021, the LRWG issued its report titled *The Massachusetts Legislature: Democracy in Decline*.¹ The LRWG's key finding was that the over-concentration of power in the Speaker of the House and, to a lesser degree, in the Senate President had led to a closed, secretive culture that disempowered elected representatives and senators from doing their job. Not only were debate and dissent all but eliminated and the Massachusetts legislature uniquely unaccountable to the public, but the work product itself was too often late, haphazard, and sometimes failed of its essential purpose. In short, the Massachusetts legislature was neither democratic nor effective.

The next step was to figure out how best to tackle the many problems and where to start. The LRWG disbanded and a new organization, the Coalition to Reform Our Legislature (CROL), was created outside the PDM umbrella to embrace a wider spectrum of interests and voices. A steering committee representing a range of political viewpoints and professional backgrounds was formed to take the next steps to restore the democratic foundation of the Massachusetts state government. This is CROL's mission:

The people of Massachusetts deserve a legislature that is effective, professional, accountable, transparent, diverse, and responsive to the will of the people. We are committed to raising awareness of the barriers interfering with the legislature's effectiveness and to promoting reforms that will optimize legislative performance.

CROL in its first few years of existence took on three initiatives. First, it embraced the State Auditor's bid to audit the legislature and the ballot question supporting that bid. Members of the steering committee urged the State House to comply with the will of the people in various ways, including testimony before the State Senate's subcommittee on the constitutionality of an audit of the legislature.² As of this writing, the legislature continues to obstruct the State Auditor's efforts.

At the same time, CROL grappled with its own legislative agenda, ultimately settling on two new initiatives in addition to supporting the State Auditor's efforts to audit the State House. One was to address the State House's lack of independent research, legislative services, and fiscal analysis. This, we hoped, might be universally embraced by the public, good-government and policy activists and organizations, and the legislature itself. Who would deny the need for better information, independent of special interests, to drive policy and to understand the potential impacts of legislation on the state's economy and on tax revenues and expenditures?

Indeed, the *Boston Globe*,³ the State Auditor, and former and current staffers were all supportive of the idea. The legislature itself? Even though Senator Jamie Eldridge, the Senate chair of the Joint Revenue Committee, perennially introduces a bill to create an office of fiscal analysis,⁴ only one legislator, Senator Ryan Fattman, agreed to support our bill.⁵

The second initiative we knew would be a tough lift: to reform the corrupt leadership-controlled legislator stipend system by limiting the number of stipended positions, lowering the ceiling on the dollar amount of stipends, and conditioning payment of stipends on meeting performance expectations. But that initiative, we believe, has the greatest potential to change the culture of the State House dramatically and quickly so that legislators are less beholden to leadership for their compensation and so that more and better work would be done. Bottom line: stipend reform would change the incentive system on Beacon Hill. Members would be free to do the job they were elected to do representing the interests and wishes of their constituents, rather than kowtowing to leadership to preserve their loyalty pay.

What happened surprised even us. Several petitioners approached legislators to file both bills in the House and Senate. Even if we could not attract a lead sponsor, we expected we would be able to file the bills by constituent request, a procedure long enshrined in Massachusetts. As expected, Representative Tricia Farley-Bouvier filed the research bill "by request" in the House — meaning without her endorsement. Senator Joan Lovely, however, initially balked at filing the bill in the Senate even by request and when she ultimately did so,

she filed it late. It still bears a docket number rather than a bill number. Both bills were consigned to the Rules Committee where they languished until the research office bill was assigned in July to the Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight, without direct notice to any of the petitioners.⁶ Neither Farley-Bouvier nor Lovely explained why they refused constituent requests to support the bill. Neither asked a single question about the policy or facts underpinning the bill.

Constituent requests to their elected representative and senator to file the stipend reform bill on their behalf were spurned outright. Instead, petitioners were allowed to submit the bill as a “citizen petition” which means, under State House rules, that it will not be given a bill number and will never receive a hearing or a vote. It is as if the bill had never been submitted at all.

We at CROL decided to hold our own public hearing. On June 17, 2025, a People’s Hearing was held on both bills across from the State House at the Church on the Hill.⁷ A follow-up survey to each member of the legislature to ask what sources of research and fiscal analysis they currently rely on and at what cost was ignored by every member of the legislature. Neither the Speaker nor the Senate President would answer press queries about the fate of either bill.⁸

There is a theme that threads through every issue, every encounter: legislators do not fear the ire of the people who voted them into office. Most are confident that they will remain in office until they choose to leave. They do not fear press criticism or censure. What they fear is retribution from leadership.

In August 2025, members of the CROL steering committee along with Partners in Democracy and Act on Mass created a ballot committee, the Legislative Effectiveness and Accountability Partnership (LEAP)⁹, to pursue a ballot initiative version of the stipend reform bill. It was approved by the Attorney General for the 2026 ballot and LEAP has now collected far more than the required 75,000 voter signatures to advance it toward submission to the voters next November.

The Time is Ripe to Insist on Change

The publication in 2021 of *The Massachusetts Legislature: Democracy in Decline* was met initially with a so-what’s-new? fatalism by party and policy activists, as well as the press, who had long ago accepted the glacial pace of legislation on urgent, critical issues, the less than stellar quality of the work that did get done, leadership’s utter contempt for demands for greater transparency and accountability, and the punitive, get-even politics that have long characterized Beacon Hill. The response from those less familiar with what goes on in the State House was horror and even disbelief, but among the cognoscenti, the reaction was muted. That

has changed. Many more people are now aware of the situation and many more people are demanding change.

While compliant legislators continue to cower to the will of leadership in exchange for lucrative committee positions, earmark crumbs they can trumpet to prove they are working hard for the folks at home, and an occasional policy win on a matter of tangential, incremental, or symbolic importance, and while polite, quiescent activists continue to herald each minor victory as a momentous step along the inevitable path to success, it may not be hubristic to say that a peaceful revolution is underway.

Here are some of the developments over the past four years that lead us to believe that the time has come for change:

The world seems a very different place now. Massachusetts continues to face significant threats arising from Trump administration policies. Like many states, the Commonwealth has had to navigate abrupt shifts in federal direction and involvement. Deep federal funding cuts have reduced support for transportation infrastructure, climate initiatives, healthcare, and food assistance programs. Despite these mounting concerns, the State House has not responded with the urgency the circumstances call for. At a time when many Americans are questioning whether public institutions still uphold the rule of law, it is all the more critical for Massachusetts to demonstrate what a well-functioning, responsible democracy should be. Now there is grave concern that the State House has managed to do very little and much less than is called for to meet the current threats. Organizations like Act on Mass and Partners in Democracy are focusing specifically on the ways in which Beacon Hill falls far short of the democratic ideal. Policy activists are beginning to recognize that they made a poor bargain, trading silent acquiescence in a corrupt system for access to legislative leadership and meager policy wins.

The public took note of the legislature's arrogant contempt for the public will. In 2022, former state senator Diana DiZoglio ran for State Auditor promising to conduct a performance as well as financial audit of the State House. Notwithstanding her win, the legislature balked at allowing her access to do the job she was elected to do. Undaunted, she undertook the heroic effort to put the question to the people via a ballot initiative "clarifying" that the State Auditor may audit the legislature. Even though the ballot question passed in 2024 with more than 71% of the popular vote, the legislature has continued to stonewall on the flimsy pretext of "separation of powers" — in utter disregard of the fact that its power derives from the people.

Finally, it seems, the general public has lost patience with the legislature's recalcitrance. In September 2024, a MassINC poll showed that 47% of likely voters disapproved of the legislature, a historic high in voter disapproval.¹⁰ Its refusal to open its doors to a constitutional

officer directly elected by the voting public and explicitly authorized by them to conduct an audit of the legislature has awakened people to the seriousness of the problem.

The legislature continued to make news and draw sharp rebukes from the press, for its inefficiencies, its failure to pass meaningful legislation in a timely fashion, its refusal to respond to demands for greater transparency and accountability, its power grabs and infighting, the misbehavior of individual legislators, and the terrible denouement of the 2023-2024 legislative session that ended with major bills not passed. The criticism has reached a crescendo.¹¹

The word is out: our legislators are working for leadership rather than their constituents. In August 2024, the *Boston Globe* ran a story¹² on the corrupt legislator compensation system described in *Democracy in Decline*. The *Globe* reported that stipends in addition to base salary were paid to 149 members of the 200-member legislature, that is, to the leadership and loyalists who were awarded committee and other leadership positions. While the state's minimum wage stagnated at \$15 per hour and legislative staffers started at less than \$65,000, Massachusetts legislators shamelessly accepted an 11.39% pay raise the governor awarded them in 2025. (In past years, other constitutional officers have refused to accept pay raises. Not so our legislators.)

The stipend system has metastasized over the past decade, as leadership has used it to cement control over the rank and file and increase its own pay. Every member of the 40-seat state Senate now is a "leader" earning a leadership stipend; in the House, 109 of 160 members receive extra leadership pay.¹³ As recently as 2013, only 60 members of the House received a stipend.¹⁴ The cost to the state's taxpayers is now well over \$5 million annually. Leadership pays itself handsomely: in 2025, the Senate President and Speaker of the House will each earn a stipend of \$119,632 in addition to base pay of \$82,046 and a travel-and-expense allowance on top of that. Do not conclude that stipends incentivize greater productivity. None of this money is tied to performance or even attendance. According to the *Globe*, more than 20% of committees with stipended leadership positions have not held a single hearing, nor been assigned a single bill.¹⁵

Report

The Performance of the Massachusetts Legislature, 2022-2025

During the past four years, the Massachusetts State House has made, at best, limited progress correcting course.

1. The legislature continued to resist demands for greater accountability and transparency.

Massachusetts continues to be the only state in the union where all three branches of government are exempt from public records laws. The Massachusetts State House is also in a small minority of state legislatures that exempt themselves from open meeting laws applicable to the executive branch and municipal government.¹⁶

In 2022, former state senator Diana DiZoglio, smarting from her own experience in the State House, ran for State Auditor. She campaigned on her experiences of sexual harassment when she was a legislative aide; in settling her claim, she was required to sign a non-disclosure agreement — yet another means by which the legislature avoids public scrutiny into allegations of wrongdoing in the State House. She vowed she would audit the legislature if she were elected State Auditor. Once in office, she found that her efforts to examine the books and records of the State House as well as its performance and practices were thwarted at every turn. Frustrated, DiZoglio turned to the voters, collecting the enormous number of signatures required to place the question of her authority to audit the State House on the ballot in 2024. As noted, she won an overwhelming mandate. Still, the State House continued to balk, resisting the voters' mandate on insubstantial constitutional grounds.¹⁷

Modest gains were achieved in the rules adopted for the 2025-2026 session.¹⁸ Among the improvements designed to increase productivity, efficiency, and transparency are public online posting of hearing attendance and committee votes, a reform the public had been demanding for years. As of December 2025, an online rule-compliance tool created by Act on Mass and Progressive Mass revealed that legislators had broken at least one of its new rules for over 49% of bills filed.¹⁹ Given that the legislature has, by statute, given its internal ethics committees sole responsibility for enforcement of state laws pertaining to its operations,²⁰ it seems unlikely that failure to adhere to the rules will result in any meaningful sanction.

2. Productivity continued to decline.

The legislature has not effectively addressed widespread criticism of its glacial pace. It remains one of the least, if not the very least, productive legislatures in the nation.

The trends noted in *Democracy in Decline* have continued: there is scant or no debate on important bills; public hearings are pure theater, usually with no interaction between the panel

of legislators and members of the public who testify; members in attendance at public hearings are not only silent but appear to be more focused on their phones and laptops than on the people testifying. Questions are rarely asked. Twenty percent of committees do not even meet, much less hold public hearings or develop legislation.

The 2023-2024 legislative session had the least productive start in at least 40 years.²¹ By the end of May, 2023, almost five months into the two-year session, only ten bills had been passed, most of which were minor and one of which did not even require legislative action.²² The slow pace continued through the disastrous end of the session. There was a public outcry that very important bills like the economic development bond bill, the Municipal Empowerment Act, the FY 24 Supplemental Budget, a substance use disorder bill, and a climate and energy siting bill did not get done by the August 1, 2024 end of the 19-month formal session.²³ Fully 20% of the total number of bills passed in the entire two-year session were passed on the final day of the year.²⁴

Another significant bill that did not make it through by August 1 was the health management regulatory oversight bill, S.2881 and H.4635, a response to the Steward Hospital debacle, even though each chamber passed its version of the legislation almost unanimously.²⁵ The bill was ultimately passed on December 30, 2024, months after the formal end of the session.²⁶ As State House News noted, “The late-session breakthrough leaves no time for any back and forth with [Governor] Healey on potential changes to the bill and essentially gives the governor a take-it-or-leave-it dynamic where she can sign the bill into law or let it die by pocket veto since the legislature that drafted the sweeping bill is about to dissolve.”²⁷

One major bill, the Affordable Homes Act, did get passed on time and was signed into law on August 8, 2024. Other bills that made it through included a comprehensive gun bill, a bill to ban PFAS in firefighter gear, and a low-income MBTA fare program and funding for regional transportation authorities.

The 2025-2026 session has, if possible, gotten off to an even slower start. By early May 2025, the legislature had passed only two bills, and by mid-June, the total inched to six.²⁸ Not a single formal session was held in the month of May. By the time that the legislature ended its formal sessions for the year, on Nov. 19, 2025, only 67 bills had been enacted, of which 51 were special laws pertaining to a single public employee or a single municipality and three more simply designated new state “awareness” days. Of the remaining 13 measures, ten were appropriations measures, several of which were enacted too late to meet fiscal deadlines.

Generally, the overarching trend is that major policy bills are not addressed on an ongoing basis during the session and then are either rushed through at the very end or left to die from neglect. As Table 3 below indicates, the result is that the vast majority of the bills the legislature passes are not of statewide significance.²⁹

All this while the public has been pressing the legislature to address anticipated federal funding cuts and rollback of personal rights that will affect the state and its residents. As of this writing, the only bill to emerge from the State House's so-called "Response 25" initiative is a health care bill known as Shield 2.0 to address reproductive rights.³⁰ Unlike a number of other states, the legislature has taken no action to decouple state taxes from provisions of the federal reconciliation bill that, without prompt state action, will cost the state hundreds of millions of dollars this year, despite a detailed warning about these costs from the state's Department of Revenue.³¹ The legislature has also been slow to address the effects of the federal government shutdown and the impending loss or delay of federal SNAP benefits.

3. Internecine conflict continued to stymie productivity.

In the past four years, relations between the chambers of the State House have deteriorated. State House squabbles, normally under wraps, have spilled out onto the public square, with members issuing press releases blaming each other for the dysfunction. Notable was the inability of the two chambers to agree on the internal rules that govern their operation. *The Boston Globe* reported in May 2023, "The inter-chamber quarrel has grown so pointed, at least one joint panel — the Telecommunications, Utilities, and Energy Committee — temporarily split into two groups, each holding their own hearings on legislation twice in as many weeks."³²

The 2025-2026 session has also started off badly. In June, the *Boston Globe* reported, "In recent weeks, Democratic leaders have jabbed at each other in press releases. They've argued about who is, and is not, attending hearings. And they have yet to even agree on rules governing their own operations, let alone on much actual legislation as state-level Democrats fashion themselves as bulwarks against Trump's administration. . . . Asked how he'd categorize his interactions with Senate leaders, House Speaker Ron Mariano said recently that he wouldn't 'even attempt to try. There's always a healthy tension, but that's on everything. That's from the simplest bill to the rules.' Pressed if that means House and Senate leaders have a good, working relationship, Mariano offered, 'Yeah', before adding: 'I don't think much has changed, to be honest with you.'"³³

The tensions stem, in part, from the imbalance between the number of House and Senate members on joint committees, of which there are an unusually high number in Massachusetts relative to other states and which are responsible for much of the most important work in the legislature. On every joint committee, the House dominates, leading to power struggles and resentments.

From 2020 through 2024, the House and Senate were unable to achieve agreement on joint rules.³⁴ That changed this year: joint rules for the 2025-2026 session were finally adopted in late June, six months into the session. A new rule adopted in 2025 allows senators to vote

out Senate-sponsored bills and members of the House to vote out House-sponsored bills. This change may ease tensions, but so far has not resulted in increased productivity.

4. The budget continued to be late.

The most critical piece of legislation the State House must pass each year is the budget. Getting it done in a timely fashion, by the July 1 start of the fiscal year, is important; personnel cannot be hired and programmatic funding cannot be committed without a budget in place. Massachusetts is often the last in the nation to complete that task. One reason is that scores of unrelated bills are tacked onto the budget as outside sections, holding up the budget while negotiations over the outside sections are concluded. The budget becomes a bargaining chip to get other bills passed without amendment or separate debate. See Table 4 for the trend line on the use of outside sections to the budget as a means to avoid debate and difficult votes.

In the period 2022-2025, the budget was late three of the four years, as it has been since 2010. The 2024 budget was not signed until five weeks into the new fiscal year.³⁵ In 2025, for the first time in 15 years, the budget was almost timely: the House passed its budget by the end of April, the Senate by late May, and the budget was released from the conference committee at the end of June.³⁶ Although the budget was not signed into law until shortly after the start of the fiscal year, this is a noteworthy improvement over past years.

5. Staff continued to be underpaid and under-resourced.

With staff actively pursuing unionization, there have been some gains in wages and job classifications, although cost-of-living adjustments have not been adopted and compensation still falls below the national average. Health insurance coverage, formerly available only after three months of employment, is now available within a month of hiring. In 2022, the Senate implemented professional development training for staff. In the wake of a memo from organizers to staff about the sordid history of sexual harassment in the State House, harassment prevention training again became mandatory.³⁷

A survey of 202 staffers conducted in late 2023 and early 2024 indicated that there were more detractors than promoters of working in the State House. Ninety percent of respondents were dissatisfied with compensation and many reported severe financial insecurity. Staff satisfaction declined with length of employment; half intended to leave within two years. Staff experience “disrespect, hostility, and abuse” on the job and a lack of training and professional advancement. They report “a widespread culture of discouragement, demoralization, and lack of change in organizational culture.”³⁸ One employee directed this feedback to legislators: “The way you prioritize your own power and relationships is toxic for democracy, degrading for your staff, and disrespects your constituents. Ask yourself if this is really why you got into public service.”³⁹

In 2022, the Senate rolled out its 3C Plan (Comprehensive Classification and Compensation) which featured a 10% pay increase for all Senate aides. In 2024, further adjustments were made both in job classifications and compensation to bring Massachusetts more in line with other states.⁴⁰

Currently, the starting salary for the lowest rung of staffers in the legislature is still under \$65,000,⁴¹ making it impossible for most to live near their workplace or pay their bills without family help or a second job. Staff are continuing the effort to unionize in order to collectively bargain for higher wages and benefits, more training, and better terms and conditions of employment. A bill to permit staff to form a union died in the 2023-2024 session,⁴² but has been reintroduced in the current session.⁴³

6. Stipends grew in number and magnitude.

As noted above, stipends now exceed the constitutionally limited base pay of many favored members of the legislature. In 2025, the Speaker and Senate President will be paid \$119,632 in addition to their base pay of \$82,046. On top of that, the flat expense allowance for legislators who live within 50 miles of the State House is now \$22,431 so that the President's and Speaker's total compensation tops \$224,000.⁴⁴ Now, in 2025, 149 "leaders" in the 200-member legislature — all 40 members of the state Senate and 109 members of the House — receive one or more stipends ostensibly for extra work and extra responsibility. Meanwhile, the state's minimum wage stagnates at \$15 per hour and legislative staffers' efforts to unionize and to obtain a living wage are spurned.

Massachusetts is one of only ten states with an ostensibly full-time legislature.⁴⁵ It is a testament to how little work many legislators are called upon to do in the Massachusetts legislature that at least half of them hold a second or even third job, own a business, or practice a profession. Others receive rental income as landlords.⁴⁶ The *Boston Globe* reported that about two dozen legislators earned over \$100,000 in outside earned income; one reported earning \$300,000.⁴⁷

Some legislators refused to provide information about their outside earnings. And because legislators who work as consultants and lawyers are not required by state financial disclosure law to identify their clients, the risk of undisclosed conflicts of interest is obvious.

7. Term limit for the Senate President was abandoned.

In February 2023, the Senate, without debate and with a 32-6 vote, abandoned the term limit for the Senate President. Since 1993, the Senate President has been limited to serving for eight consecutive years. The eight-year term limit for the Speaker of the House had been struck in 2001, then reinstated in 2009, then struck again under the reign of Speaker Robert DeLeo, who served twelve years as Speaker.⁴⁸ As Josh Landes of WAMC in the Berkshires noted, "The

move was made before Spilka issued the prized committee assignments that kick off the start of the legislative session.”⁴⁹

8. Diversity gains were minimal.

Women and people of color continue to be under-represented in the State House, particularly in the Senate, relative to the state’s demographic composition.

9. The legislature continued to tolerate misbehavior among its members and to protect them from consequences.

The Massachusetts legislature has a long and sordid history of illegal, unethical, and even criminal behavior among its members it is beyond the scope of this report to detail. Worth noting here is that the leadership of the legislature continues to cosset the offenders, closing ranks, and stonewalling the public and the press.

Since 2021 at least three members of the legislature have been charged with criminal offenses.^{50 51} The legislative leadership resisted calls to take prompt action to remove any of the three.

10. Statements of Financial Interests remain weak, out of date, and difficult to obtain.

Among the 49 states that require Statements of Financial Interests (SFIs), Massachusetts ranks last in making such information available to the public.⁵² SFIs are critical for boosting public confidence that legislators and policymakers are acting in the public interest rather than their own. Massachusetts requires those seeking access to SFIs to provide photo identification and identifies requesters to the official whose SFI is being requested. Such practices amount to intimidation, serving only to keep financial information hidden from public view.

Filers report asset values in brackets⁵³ which have not been updated since 1978 when the law governing SFIs first went into effect. Back then, the mean household income was less than \$20,000 per year; in 1980, the mean home value was \$48,400. To highlight just how out of date the brackets are, the highest bracket for assessed home values in the SFI is “greater than \$100,000.” To change the bracket values requires legislation. A near-half century after the law was enacted, it is long past time for revision. Currently, the public is deprived of important information about legislators’ conflicts of interest and financial incentives driving or preventing legislation. The public deserves meaningful disclosure.

Appendices

Appendix A updates data on legislator compensation, productivity, transparency, diversity, and professionalism. Appendix B is an excerpted interview with Michael Widmer, former Director of Communications in the first administration of Governor Michael S. Dukakis and longtime head of the Mass. Taxpayers Foundation. In this interview, he reflects on his long experience with the legislature and talks about how its culture has changed in recent decades.

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Appendix A

Updates to 2021 *Democracy in Decline*

Legislators' Salary, Stipends, and Other Compensation

Legislators' base salaries remain constitutionally limited, with additional compensation provided primarily through stipends linked to leadership and committee appointments controlled by the Speaker and Senate President.

In 2021, all state representatives and state senators earned a base salary of \$70,536. In addition, 105 of the 160 House members and all 40 Senators received stipends which ranged from \$5,908 for committee vice chairs to \$90,893 for the Speaker and Senate President. While state legislators accepted increases that year in both base salary and stipends, Governor Charlie Baker (\$185,000), Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito (\$165,000), Attorney General Maura Healey (\$185,377), Secretary of State William Galvin (\$178,695), and Treasurer Deborah Goldberg (\$189,560) all rejected the salary increases they were entitled to.⁵⁴

As of 2025, legislators receive a base salary of \$82,046, an increase of 16% since 2021. Stipends have increased twice as fast, by almost 32%, since 2021. They now range from \$7,776 to \$119,632. In 2025, the number of stipended positions in the House is now 109. In the Senate, with only 40 members, there are 74 stipended positions.

Stipends are only part of the compensation legislators are paid over the constitutionally limited base salary. In addition, legislators enjoy an expense allowance, partially tax-exempt State House parking, subsidized insurance (health, dental, vision, life, and optional disability), access to pre-tax spending accounts, and legacy insurance premium rates for legislators enrolled before 2003.⁵⁵

Table 1: Highest Paid Senators & Representatives (2025) ⁵⁶

<i>Highest-paid Senators</i>	Sen. Karen Spilka (D-Ashland)	Sen. Michael Rodrigues (D-Westport)	Sen. Cynthia Creem (D-Newton)
<i>Total cash compensation</i>	\$224,107.08	\$216,929.17	\$216,630.09

<i>Highest-paid Representatives</i>	Rep. Ronald Mariano (D-Quincy)	Rep. Aaron Michlewitz (D-Boston)	Rep. Bradley Jones (R-North Reading)
<i>Total cash compensation</i>	\$224,107.08	\$201,676.11	\$194,199.12

The gap in compensation between the highest-paid and lowest-paid legislators now stands at almost \$120,000.

Table 2: Stipended Positions in the Massachusetts House (2025)

Position	Number of positions	2025-2026 Stipend	Stipend Increase since 2021
Speaker of the House	1	\$119,631.81	+ \$28,738.81
House Ways and Means Chair	1	\$97,200.84	+ \$23,349.84
Majority & Minority Leaders (Floor Leaders)	2	\$89,723.85	+ \$21,553.85
Speaker Pro Tempore	1	\$74,769.88	+ \$17,961.88
Assistant Floor Leaders	7	\$52,338.92	+ \$12,572.92
Division Leaders, Select Committee Chairs, Select Ranking Minority Members, and Ways and Means Vice Chair	20	\$44,861.93	+ \$10,776.93

Committee Chairs, Ranking Minority Members, Select Vice Chairs, and Ways and Means Assistant Vice Chair	50	\$22,430.96	+ 5,387.96
Committee Vice Chairs	27	\$7,776.07	+ \$1,868.07

Legislative Outcomes in the State House

Although thousands of bills are filed each session, only a small fraction are enacted, fewer still with substantive, statewide impact. Leadership’s reliance on “outside sections” attached to budget and bond bills to enact unrelated legislation favors autocratic efficiency over democratic transparency, debate, and public accountability.

In 2021, approximately 7,141 bills were filed in the two-year legislative session; 564 were enacted. Of those, the majority affected local jurisdictions or individuals, not statewide policy. At the same time, the use of outside sections, policy riders attached to must-pass financial bills, including the annual budget, remained high and allowed leadership to bypass typical scrutiny and committee review. Massachusetts had not passed a budget by the July 1 fiscal year deadline for eleven consecutive years, and had only met the deadline five times in the past twenty-three years.⁵⁷

In the 2023-2024 legislative session, 8,177 bills were filed and just 489 passed, roughly 6%. The current 2025-2026 legislative session has seen 6,785 bills filed and only 67 enacted as of November 30. Of those, the majority have only limited impact. For example, Ch. 6 of the Acts of 2025 (S.2508) established a sick leave bank for a single trial court employee, while Ch. 5 (S.2152) designated June 7 as Tourette Syndrome Awareness Day.⁵⁸

The trend of late state budgets persists. Massachusetts has failed to enact a budget by the July 1 deadline for 14 consecutive years. The FY2026 budget passed the legislature at the very end of June and was signed by the Governor on July 4, a substantial improvement over past years but still late. The budget conference committee process remains shrouded in secrecy, with decisions made by a group of six legislators behind closed doors, often at the last minute, further limiting legislative and public input.

Year-to-year comparison of the number and types of legislation passed in the Massachusetts legislature demonstrates that legislative efficiency and output have declined substantially. See Table 3 below.

Table 3: Bills Passed by the Massachusetts Legislature ⁵⁹

Year	Bills Enacted	Major Policy Bills	Appropriation, Financial, and Bonds Bills	Sick Leave Banks and Other Personnel-Specific Bills	Home Rule Petitions and Other Local Bills	Minor Policy Bills
2017	176	14	9	46	92	15
2018	450	61	17	74	272	26
Session Total	626	75	26	120	364	41
2019	153	17	9	47	74	6
2020	386	54	12	42	258	20
Session Total	539	71	21	89	332	26
2023	89	5	6	22	51	5
2024	407	28	7	27	315	30
Session Total	496	33	13	49	366	35
2025 (as of December 9)	79	6	11	16	43	3

Data sourced from legislative records reflect a significant decline in the number of major policy bills passed in recent years, and a preponderance of passed legislation that is pertinent only to specific personnel or applicable only to specific municipalities. The use of outside sections in the annual budget and other must-pass financial bills has remained very high.

Outside sections, attached to must-pass appropriations bills, allow controversial legislation like the Roe Act to pass without debate or amendment.

Table 4: Number of Outside Sections of the Massachusetts State Legislature Over Time⁶⁰

Year	Number of Outside Sections
2017	236
2018	318
<i>Session Total</i>	<i>554</i>
2019	261
2020	282
<i>Session Total</i>	<i>543</i>
2023	443
2024	497
<i>Session Total</i>	<i>940</i>
2025 (as-of 11/30)	450

Of particular note is the sharp increase in the number of outside sections from the 2019-2020 session to the 2023-2024 session. This reflects a significant increase in policymaking that skirts democratic processes, rather than working through the give-and-take and robust debate of an open and democratic legislative process. Laws passed by circumventing debate and amendments protect legislators from being held accountable by the constituents they were elected to represent.

Transparency

Massachusetts has consistently ranked near the bottom nationally in legislative transparency and public access to information, with minimal reforms in recent years to address longstanding concerns.

In 2013, Massachusetts received an “F” from Ballotpedia⁶¹ for public accessibility and in 2015 was ranked 40th in the nation by the Center for Public Integrity for public access to information.⁶² These low grades were based on factors such as the lack of public roll call votes in committees, the opacity of online legislative data platforms, weak appeal pathways for

denied information requests, and the absence of robust oversight mechanisms to enforce transparency. Neither the public records law nor the open meeting law applies to the state legislature, allowing lawmakers to vote in secret, particularly in committee, where many bills are effectively killed outside of public view.

Over a decade later, in 2025, these structural issues remain little improved. No other state besides Massachusetts continues to exempt all three branches of government—executive, legislative, and judicial—from public records laws.⁶³ One step forward: the Joint Rules adopted for the current legislative session require committee votes and hearing testimony to be made public for the first time in recent history.

Diversity

The Massachusetts legislature has long failed to reflect the racial and gender diversity of the state's population. While some incremental changes have occurred, progress remains slow and uneven, particularly within leadership and committee structures.

As of 2021, 21 members (13%) of the 160-member Massachusetts House were people of color: seven Black, seven Latino, and seven Asian. Fifty members (31%) were women. The Senate was even less diverse, with only two members (5%) people of color, neither of them Black, and twelve women (30%). In total, 23 of 200 legislators (11.5%) were people of color, and only seven (3.5%) were Black.

As of 2025, there have been modest gains in diversity. Currently, there are 26 members of the Black and Latino Legislative Caucus and seven members of the Asian House Caucus, for a total of 33 members in both chambers who are people of color.⁶⁴ In the House, there are 29 people of color (18.2%); 51 representatives (32%) are women. In the Senate, only four members are people of color (10.3%), none are Asian, and only eleven are women (28%).⁶⁵ To put these numbers in perspective, the U.S. Census Bureau's 2024 report on Massachusetts demographics estimated that 21% of the state population were people of color, and that 51.1% were female.⁶⁶

The diversity of leadership is little improved. Fourteen of the 16 (87%) House leaders are white; only four (25%) are women. Of the 44 House chairs of House or joint committees, just two (4.5%) are people of color, both Latino men; all chairs of House standing committees are white. In the Senate, all 13 members of the leadership are white; four (31%) are women. Of the three Democratic senators of color, a Black woman, a Latina woman, and a Black man, each serves as a co-chair of a joint committee but none are chair any of the eleven Senate standing committees. As of 2025, Black legislators hold only two committee chair positions in the

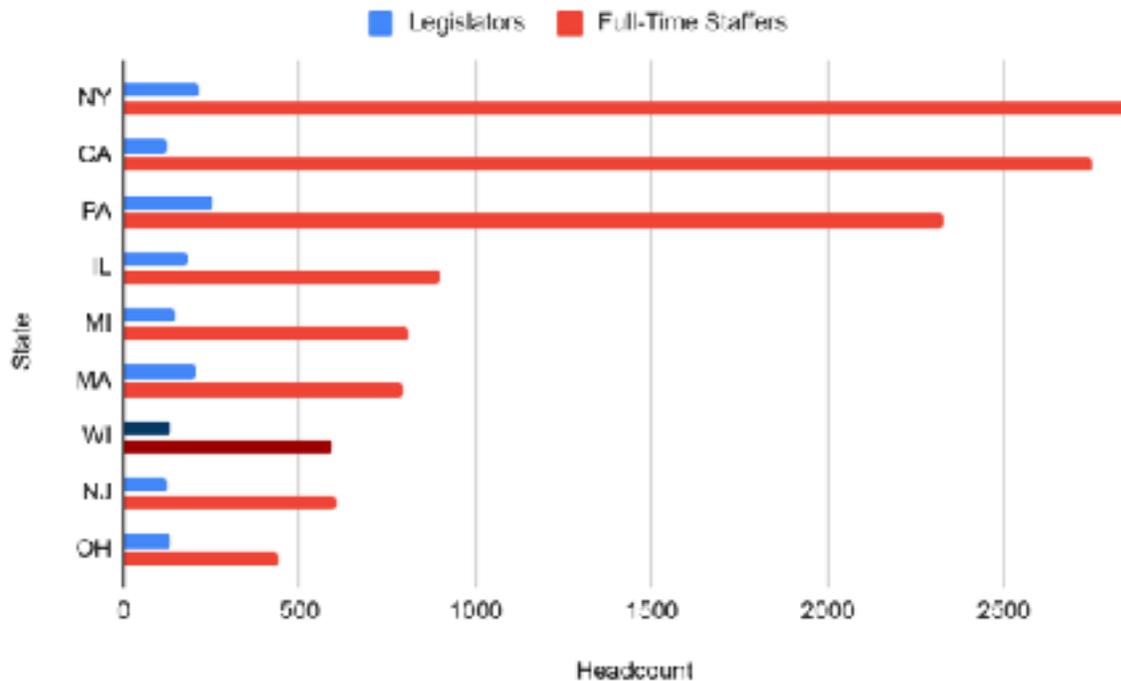
legislature.

The entrenched white male network continues to dominate Beacon Hill. As long as incumbents do not face intra-party competition, diversity gains will be very limited.

Professionalism

Massachusetts stands out nationally for its lack of legislative professionalism. It is the only state without any independent legislative services agency or office, such as a fiscal or research bureau, to support informed lawmaking. Unlike other states, legislators in Massachusetts must rely heavily on leadership staff for information, as aides are underpaid, overworked, and few in number. See Figure 1. This structural deficit undermines independent decision-making and reinforces the Speaker’s power. Staff typically move from committee to committee assignment with their assigned legislator, requiring them to learn a new subject-matter area with each new assignment. They educate themselves largely on an ad hoc basis, learning on the job without formal training.

Figure 1: Full-Time Staffers to Legislators Ratio in 2023⁶⁷



Appendix B

Interview of Michael Widmer by Katharina Wilkes, July 28, 2025 (excerpted)

Note: Michael Widmer served as Director of Communications in the first administration of Governor Michael S. Dukakis. From 1990-2015, he headed the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation.

Michael Widmer: Starting in the early '90s, with Tom Finneran, you began to see a consolidation of power around the Speaker's office. I had a good relationship with him and all of these people, but he started that trend, and it has continued and accelerated. At the same time, the Republicans in Massachusetts have kind of cut a deal with the leadership: 'Give us running room, give us stipends, and we'll oppose you on paper, but not make a lot of fuss.' That seems to be how they behave. Maybe they have to, since they don't have the numbers to make a real difference.

In the '70s and '80s, you had three important things: a strong committee structure, active floor debates, and a variety of groups within the legislature. Committees reported to the Speaker, David Bartley, at the time, who was very good, but committee chairs had a lot of autonomy. They became experts, did their own research, and pushed legislation with broad agreement from leadership. There were real committee discussions and votes. That's all gone now.

You also had roaring debates on the House and Senate floors. One example: the debate in the early '70s on reducing the House from 240 to 160 members. It was pushed by the League of Women Voters. There were great public debates on that. Those debates crossed party lines. There was also a progressive Democratic group, a substantial one, and a sizable Republican presence. Not many women or minorities yet, though. Mostly Irish men who had long controlled Boston politics.

You also saw coalitions form across party lines. One of the most dramatic examples was the 1980 Management Rights Act for the MBTA. The progressive Democrats and Republicans came together to reduce the unions' control over personnel decisions. Barney Frank led the charge for the Democrats, and Paul Cellucci, who later became governor, was on the Republican side. It was a really effective and bipartisan piece of legislation.

There's a long tradition here of doing things behind closed doors. Massachusetts has a liberal veneer, but state and local government remain very tribal, meaning not transparent.

In the '70s and '80s, the legislature was much more transparent. You had debates, votes, and real accountability. People paid attention. You also had public votes and public committee deliberations. That's all gone.

One notable shift was the budget amendment process. There used to be real debates. Then, [Thomas] Finneran grouped amendments, met privately with sponsors, and announced decisions in advance. That eliminated floor debate. If an amendment was controversial, leadership pressured the sponsor to withdraw it to avoid a vote. So now, there's essentially no debate.

Some people talk about running reform candidates. That's fine, but I don't think it'll make much difference. Even if four new people get elected, leadership can isolate them. Real change has to come from leadership itself.

Until we get a leader who says, 'We're going back to how things used to be,' I think we'll have to keep pushing from the outside. Organizational change is hard. The leadership has all the levers: committee assignments, office space, no staff for members – it's very hard for reps to do anything independently.

There was a moment at the People's Hearing that stuck with me: a man said he used to work at the State House and remembered watching debates in the 2000s. He said he recently mentioned this to a current staffer, and she said, "Wait – there were debates?" That little vignette says it all.

Notes

¹ Legislative Reform Working Group, “The Massachusetts Legislature: Democracy in Decline,” 2021, https://www.progressivedemsofmass.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/democracy_in_decline_final.pdf.¹

² CROL activities in support of the audit are collected here: <https://www.malegreform.org/auditing-the-legislature/>.

³ The Editorial Board, “Massachusetts legislature operates in the dark. Is anyone surprised?”, *Boston Globe*, October 25, 2024, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2024/10/25/opinion/dizoglio-audit-legislature/> (“One of the best ideas in the report was the resurrection of the Legislative Research Bureau — a nonpartisan agency to help lawmakers and committees deal with bill drafting, research, and fiscal analysis and provide legal services. . . . The implications are obvious — without an independent source of research, lawmakers are dependent on their own usually small staff, sometimes on lobbyists and special interest groups or legislative leadership, where power is now firmly concentrated.”)

⁴ [S.2130](#), An Act Establishing a Legislative Fiscal Office, 194th Session (Sen. James B. Eldridge).

⁵ Drysdale, S., “Critics of Mass. Legislature eye possible ballot campaign,” *NBC Boston*, June 18, 2025, <https://www.nbcboston.com/news/politics/critics-of-mass-legislature-eye-possible-ballot-campaign/3744934/>. (“Speaker Ron Mariano’s office did not respond to a question about whether the bills would receive hearings at all this legislative session. A Senate president Karen Spilka spokesperson declined to comment.”); Playoff, E., “Bipartisan group pushing legislature to rein in generous leadership pay structure,” *The Boston Globe*, January 18, 2025, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/01/18/metro/legislature-leadership-pay-overhaul/> (“In response to inquiries [about CROL’s stipend reform bill], neither the Senate president nor the House speaker took a position on the measure or even whether it merits a hearing.”)

⁶ [SD.2614](#); [H.3892](#), An Act Establishing Offices of Legislative Research and Fiscal Analysis, 194th Session.

⁷ Coalition to Reform Our Legislature, “The People’s Hearing,” <https://www.malegreform.org/peoples-hearing/>.

⁸ Drysdale, S., “Critics of Mass. Legislature eye possible ballot campaign,” *NBC Boston*, June 18, 2025, <https://www.nbcboston.com/news/politics/critics-of-mass-legislature-eye-possible-ballot-campaign/3744934/>.

⁹ <https://www.stipendreform.com>.

¹⁰ Dumcius, G., “Poll indicates growing frustration with Legislature,” *Commonwealth Beacon*, September 24, 2024, <https://commonwealthbeacon.org/by-the-numbers/poll-shows-growing-frustration-with-legislature/>.

¹¹ CROL has assembled an archive of news and commentary about the state legislature on its website at <https://www.malegreform.org/news-coverage/>.

¹² Platoff, E.. and Crimaldi, L., “In the Massachusetts Legislature, Nearly Everyone Is a Leader. Just Look at Their Paychecks,” *Boston Globe*, August 5, 2024, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2024/08/05/metro/massachusetts-house-stipends-leadership-pay/?event=event12#bgmp-comments/>.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ Shoenberg, S., “State salary database: How much do state lawmakers earn?” *Mass Live*, June 30, 2014, https://www.masslive.com/politics/2014/06/state_salary_database_how_much.html.

¹⁵ Platoff, E. and Crimaldi, L., “He earns an extra \$61,000 to lead two committees. They never considered a bill,” *Boston Globe*, May 31, 2024, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2024/05/31/metro/massachusetts-legislature-committees-no-hearings-generous-stipends>.

¹⁶ Baleno, B., “Massachusetts’ path from transparency to secrecy in 200 years,” *The Daily Collegian*, October 3, 2023, <https://dailycollegian.com/2023/10/massachusetts-path-from-transparency-to-secrecy-in-200-years/>.

¹⁷ CROL has compiled press coverage of the audit issue, <https://www.malegreform.org/auditing-the-legislature/>.

¹⁸ “House Passes Joint Rules and House Rules for 2025-2026 Legislative Session,” *Massachusetts State House Press Room*, February 25, 2025, <https://malegislature.gov/PressRoom/Detail?pressReleaseId=174>.

¹⁹ *Beacon Hill Compliance Tracker*, December 9, 2025, <https://beaconhilltracker.org>

²⁰ *See, e.g.*, M.G.L. c. 3, § 9D, which provides, “The president of the senate and speaker of the house of representatives shall not receive earned income from any other source, but may receive unearned or passive income. The senate and the house of representatives shall biennially adopt rules for the administration and enforcement of this section. The house committee on ethics and the senate committee on ethics, respectively, shall have the exclusive jurisdiction over the administration and enforcement of this section.”

- ²¹ Stout, M., “Massachusetts Has Passed Just 10 Laws This Year, the Fewest to Open a Legislative Session in Decades. It’s a Sign of the Times,” *Boston Globe*, May 29, 2023, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2023/05/29/metro/massachusetts-has-passed-just-10-laws-this-year-fewest-open-legislative-session-decades-its-sign-times>; Act On Mass, “05/03/2025 Saturday Scoop: House budget arrives amid historically slow start to legislative session,” <https://actonmass.org/post/2025/05/06/05-03-2025-saturday-scoop-house-budget-arrives-amid-historically-slow-start-to-legislative-session/>.
- ²² Stout, M., *ibid.*
- ²³ Adams, E. and Convey, E., “What’s Next for the Legislature after Big Stumbles?” *MASsterList*, August 2, 2024, <https://massterlist.com/2024/08/02/whats-next-for-the-legislature-after-big-stumbles/>; Viall, T., “2024 End of Formal Session Legislative Outcomes: MAPC Priorities and Interest Areas.” *Metropolitan Area Planning Council*, August 6, 2024, <https://www.mapc.org/planning101/2024-end-formal-session-legislative-outcomes/>.
- ²⁴ Act On Mass, “05/03/2025 Saturday Scoop: House budget arrives amid historically slow start to legislative session,” *supra*.
- ²⁵ Shalom, A., Warren, A., Vernaglia, L., and Meyer, I., “Massachusetts Health Care Act Dies at the End of Legislative Session But Previews Sweeping Changes for the Health Care Industry,” Foley and Lardner, LLP, August 5, 2024, <https://www.foley.com/insights/publications/2024/08/massachusetts-health-care-act-dies/>.
- ²⁶ The Massachusetts State House Press Room, “Legislature Passes Major Health Care Oversight Legislation, Regulates Private Equity,” December 30, 2024, <https://malegislature.gov/pressroom/detail?pressreleaseid=164>; Kutznitz, A., “Legislature Salvages Steward Crisis Response Bill,” State House News Service, December 30, 2024, https://www.statehousenews.com/news/healthcare/legislature-salvages-steward-crisis-response-bill/article_759980a6-c6df-11ef-93c2-d3f0e62c46fe.html.
- ²⁷ Kutznitz, A., *ibid.*
- ²⁸ <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2025>; *see also* Gross, S. and Stout, M., “Massachusetts Legislature’s Democrats Grapple with Tensions over Rules and Trump.” *Boston Globe*, June 16, 2025, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/06/16/metro/massachusetts-legislature-democrats-tension-rules-trump/>.

²⁹ Minor bills of limited significance include, for example, bills to create a sick leave bank for a single state employee or approving a single municipality’s home rule petition. In 2023, one of the most important of the ten bills passed in the first five months of the session created a new housing secretary; it passed automatically on the expiration of 60 days without legislative action. Stout, M., “Massachusetts Has Passed Just 10 Laws This Year, the Fewest to Open a Legislative Session in Decades. It’s a Sign of the Times.” *Boston Globe*, May 29, 2023, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2023/05/29/metro/massachusetts-has-passed-just-10-laws-this-year-fewest-open-legislative-session-decades-its-sign-times/>.

³⁰ S.2543, An Act Strengthening Health Care Protections in the Commonwealth, <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/194/S2538/>. The bill was passed on July 31, 2025.

³¹ Massachusetts Department of Revenue, “Draft TIR: Massachusetts Conformity to Certain Provisions in Public Law No. 119-221, October 21, 2025, <https://www.mass.gov/technical-information-release/working-draft-tir-massachusetts-conformity-to-certain-provisions-in-public-law-no-119-21>; Gross, S., “On eve of possible government shutdown, storm clouds darken Massachusetts’ fiscal outlook,” *Boston Globe*, September 30, 2025, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/09/30/metro/massachusetts-budget-trump-bill-shutdown/>.

³² Stout, M., “Massachusetts Has Passed Just 10 Laws This Year, the Fewest to Open a Legislative Session in Decades. It’s a Sign of the Times.” *Boston Globe*, May 29, 2023, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2023/05/29/metro/massachusetts-has-passed-just-10-laws-this-year-fewest-open-legislative-session-decades-its-sign-times/>.

³³ Gross, S. and Stout, M., “Massachusetts Legislature’s Democrats Grapple with Tensions over Rules and Trump,” *Boston Globe*, June 16, 2025, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/06/16/metro/massachusetts-legislature-democrats-tension-rules-trump/> (“There is irritation and exasperation among legislators, but ‘not outright animosity,’ said one lawmaker who spoke on the condition of anonymity given the sensitivity between the two chambers. . . . ‘We didn’t learn our lesson from bad relations of last session and the bad press that followed’”).

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ Hudzik, S., “Once again, Massachusetts begins a new fiscal year with no budget deal in place,” *New England Public Media*, July 1, 2024, <https://www.nepm.org/regional-news/2024-07-01/once-again-massachusetts-begins-a-new-fiscal-year-with-no-budget-deal-in-place>.

³⁶ The Arc of Mass, “The State Budget Process,” July 10, 2025, <https://thearcofmass.org/advocacy/state-budget/>.

³⁷ See Massachusetts State House Employee Union, “Frequently Asked Questions,” <https://statehouseemployeeunion.org/faq/>.

³⁸ <https://statehouseemployeeunion.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2023-24-Staff-Experience-Survey-Results-Presentation.pdf>.

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ <https://www.nbcboston.com/news/local/mass-senate-to-adjust-staff-compensation-expand-career-ladder/3280741/>.

⁴¹ <https://cthrupayroll.mass.gov/#!/year/2025/>

⁴² S.2014/H.3069 – An Act relative to collective bargaining rights for legislative employees.

⁴³ S.1343/H.2778 - An Act relative to collective bargaining rights for legislative employees.

⁴⁴ The expense and travel allotment for legislators who reside within 50 miles of the State House is \$22,430.96 in 2025; those who reside further than 50 miles from the State House receive \$29,907.95. “Beacon Hill Roll Call: Detailing pay, benefits for state senators,” *Lowell Sun*, April 6, 2025, <https://www.lowellsun.com/2025/04/07/beacon-hill-roll-call-detailing-pay-benefits-for-state-senators/>.

⁴⁵ The other nine states with full-time legislatures are Alaska, California, Hawaii, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Of the ten, NCLS considers only California, Michigan, New York and Pennsylvania to have fully staffed, well-paid, truly full-time legislatures. See National Conference of State Legislatures, “Full- and Part-Time Legislatures,” July 28, 2021, <https://www.ncsl.org/about-state-legislatures/full-and-part-time-legislatures>; “States with a full-time legislature,” *Ballotpedia*, 2017, https://ballotpedia.org/States_with_a_full-time_legislature.

⁴⁶ Stout, M., “Massachusetts Lawmakers’ Outside Jobs Raise Questions about Time, Priorities, and Transparency,” *Boston Globe*, December 19, 2024, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2024/12/19/metro/massachusetts-lawmakers-outside-jobs/>.

⁴⁷ Rep. Francisco Paulino of Lawrence reported four private-sector jobs plus ownership interests in six businesses, earning him over \$300,000. Paulino is not an outlier: Sen. Barry Finegold of Andover earned at least \$266,000 over and above his State House salary; he reported four private-sector jobs and equity interests in seven businesses. Stout, M., “Massachusetts Lawmakers’ Outside Jobs Raise Questions about Time, Priorities, and Transparency,” *Boston Globe*, December 19, 2024, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2024/12/19/metro/massachusetts-lawmakers-outside-jobs/>.

⁴⁸ Lannan, K., “Mass. Senate removes term limits for its president,” *WGBH*, February 9, 2023, <https://www.wgbh.org/news/politics/2023-02-09/mass-senate-removes-term-limits-for-its-president>.

⁴⁹ Landes, J., “Mark explains why he backed the removal of term limits for Mass. Senate President,” *WAMC Northeast Public Radio*, February 10, 2023, <https://www.wamc.org/news/2023-02-10/mark-explains-why-he-backed-the-removal-of-term-limits-for-mass-senate-president>.

⁵⁰ In 2024, former State Senator Dean Tran was convicted of 23 federal felony counts of COVID and tax fraud. In February 2025, he was sentenced to 18 months in prison and ordered to pay restitution and a fine. United States Attorney's Office District of Massachusetts, "Former Massachusetts State Senator Sentenced to 18 Months in Prison for COVID and Tax Fraud," February 7, 2025, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ma/pr/former-massachusetts-state-senator-sentenced-18-months-prison-covid-and-tax-fraud>. According to the Special Agent in Charge of the Boston office of the FBI, "Former State Senator Dean Tran was convicted of cheating taxpayers by cashing in on a public health crisis by diverting tens of thousands of dollars meant to support those out of work due to the pandemic to himself instead." United States Attorney's Office District of Massachusetts, "Former Massachusetts State Senator Convicted of COVID and Tax Fraud," September 12, 2024, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ma/pr/former-massachusetts-state-senator-convicted-covid-and-tax-fraud>.

Earlier, in 2023, Tran was indicted on two counts of violating state ethics laws by utilizing public employees on state time in his 2018 and 2020 campaigns for re-election. The formal charge came three years after a Senate ethics report referred the issue to the Attorney General for prosecutions. By that time, Tran had failed in his bid for re-election. Massachusetts Offices of the Attorney General, "Former State Senator Dean Tran Indicted On Two Counts Of State Ethics Law Violations," September 29, 2023, <https://www.mass.gov/news/former-state-senator-dean-tran-indicted-on-two-counts-of-state-ethics-law-violations>.

In April 2025, Rep. Christopher Flanagan of Dennis was indicted by the U.S. Attorney's Office in Boston on federal fraud charges. According to U.S. Attorney Leah B. Foley, "Today's charges against Massachusetts State Representative Christopher Flanagan reveal an appalling breach of public trust. According to the indictment, Mr. Flanagan defrauded the very organization he was supposed to serve — allegedly funneling tens of thousands of dollars into his own pockets to pay off personal bills, buy luxury items and bankroll his political campaign. He allegedly stole money and then went to extraordinary lengths to cover it up, going so far as fabricating fake personas to mislead those who questioned his conduct. This alleged scheme was calculated on every level. . . No one is entitled to power by way of fraud, and the people of Massachusetts deserve better." United States Attorney's Office District of Massachusetts, "Massachusetts State Representative Arrested and Charged in Alleged Fraud and Cover-Up Scheme," April 11, 2025, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ma/pr/massachusetts-state-representative-arrested-and-charged-alleged-fraud-and-cover-scheme>.

This indictment followed the 2024 finding by the Office of Campaign and Political Finance that Flanagan had violated the state's campaign finance laws for which Flanagan was

⁵¹ fined \$39,572. Coffey, D., “Town leaders for MA state Rep. Chris Flanagan’s entire district now demand his resignation,” *Cape Cod Times*, June 25, 2025, <https://www.capecodtimes.com/story/news/politics/2025/06/25/ma-state-rep-christopher-flanagan-yarmouth-dennis-brewster=resignation/84334122007/>.

While Governor Maura Healy and other officials, including the select boards of Brewster, Yarmouth, and Dennis, called upon Flanagan to resign, the leadership in the legislature said it would consider Flanagan’s fate after the federal case was concluded. Speaker Ronald Mariano said calls for resignation were premature. Flanagan continues in office. McKenna, C., “Mass. House Speaker Mariano resists calls for indicted Cape Cod rep. to resign,” *MassLive*, April 16, 2025, <https://www.masslive.com/news/2025/04/mass-house-speaker-mariano-resists-calls-for-indicted-cape-cod-rep-to-resign.html>.

In July 2025, Rep. John Lawn of Watertown, chair of the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing, was arrested around 1 am after leaving the State House. He was charged with operating under the influence of alcohol, leaving the scene after hitting a parked car, and running two stop signs. Lawn admitted responsibility. He lost his license for 45 days, was fined and placed on probation for a year, and was ordered to undergo treatment. Having resisted calls to resign, he was not removed from office and continues as chair of the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing. The legislative leadership never explained the circumstances under which Lawn apparently left the State House late at night in a state of inebriation. *Id.*

⁵² Editorial Staff, “Study Finds Massachusetts Lagging on Transparency of Public Official Statements of Financial Interest,” *Pioneer Institute*, March 12, 2019, https://pioneerinstitute.org/better_government/study-finds-massachusetts-lagging-on-transparency-of-public-official-statements-of-financial-interest/.

⁵³ M.G.L. c. 268B, §1, defines the “amount” which must be disclosed as follows: “‘Amount’, a category of value, rather than an exact dollar figure, as follows: greater than \$1,000 but not more than \$5,000; greater than \$5,000 but not more than \$10,000; greater than \$10,000 but not more than \$20,000; greater than \$20,000 but not more than \$40,000; greater than \$40,000 but not more than \$60,000; greater than \$60,000 but not more than \$100,000; greater than \$100,000.”

⁵⁴ Tiernan, E., “Many Massachusetts State Lawmakers Earning Six-Figure Pay, One Tops \$220,000,” *Boston Herald*, January 5, 2022, <https://www.bostonherald.com/2022/01/04/many-massachusetts-state-lawmakers-earning-six-figure-salaries-state-payroll-shows/>.

⁵⁵ Katzen, B., “Beacon Hill Roll Call: Breaking down Salaries, Benefits of State Reps,” *Lowell Sun*, April 28, 2025, <https://www.lowellsun.com/2025/04/28/beacon-hill-roll-call-breaking-down-salaries-benefits-of-state-reps/>.

⁵⁶ *Id.*; Katzen, B., “Beacon Hill Roll Call: March 31 to April 4, 2025,” *Greenfield Recorder*, April 11, 2025, <https://www.recorder.com/Beacon-Hill-Roll-Call-March-31-to-April-4-2025-60534503>.

⁵⁷ “Massachusetts State Legislative Dashboard,” *LegiScan*, 2023, <https://legiscan.com/MA>.

⁵⁸ “Massachusetts 2025-2026 194th General Court Legislation,” *LegiScan*, 2025, <https://legiscan.com/MA/legislation/2025?status=passed>.

⁵⁹ See *Democracy in Decline*, *ibid.* “Major Policy Bills” are bills with extensive projected impact on the majority of Massachusetts residents. “Minor Policy Bills” are smaller bills pertaining to specific occupations, geographic locations, and animals that are unlikely to have been considered major legislation by the media or determined to be critical legislative choices for many voters. Bills were allocated to categories through the consensus of the research team.

⁶⁰ For consistency, the term “outside sections” was defined as provisions added to the annual budget bills, supplemental budgets, and bond bills that are unrelated to the sections that appropriate funds or specify the bonding activity. The pandemic years 2021 through 2022 were excluded as exceptional and transitional.

⁶¹ “Open States’ Legislative Data Report Card,” *Ballotpedia*, 2013, https://ballotpedia.org/Open_States%27_Legislative_Data_Report_Card.

⁶² Mulvihill, M. and Ford, B., “Massachusetts Gets D+ Grade in 2015 State Integrity Investigation,” *Center for Public Integrity*, November 9, 2015, <https://publicintegrity.org/politics/state-politics/state-integrity-investigation/massachusetts-gets-d-grade-in-2015-state-integrity-investigation/>.

⁶³ Halpin, M., “Stories untold: Massachusetts public records law leaves public in the dark,” *The Suffolk Journal*, February 12, 2025, <https://thesuffolkjournal.com/46736/news/stories-untold-massachusetts-public-records-law-leaves-public-in-the-dark/>.

⁶⁴ Massachusetts Black and Latino Caucus, <https://www.mblbc.org/services>; Massachusetts House Asian Caucus, <https://www.asiancaucusma.com/>.

⁶⁵ Currently, according to the State House website, <http://malegislature.gov>, there is a vacancy in each chamber. For data on women in elected positions around the nation, see Center for American Women and Politics, “Women Elected Officials by Position,” *Rutgers-New Brunswick Eagleton Institute of Politics*, <https://cawpdata.rutgers.edu/women-elected-officials/position?current=1&level%5B0%5D=State%20Legislative&state%5B0%5D=Massachusetts&page=1>.

⁶⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, “QuickFacts: Massachusetts,” Census Bureau QuickFacts (United States Census Bureau, 2024), <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MA/PST045224>.

⁶⁷ “Legislatures at a Glance,” *National Conference of State Legislatures*, 2023, <https://www.ncsl.org/about-state-legislatures/legislatures-at-a-glance>.