

MASSACHUSETTS STATE BUDGET PROCESS AND TIMELINE

The budget

- A new state budget is passed every year.
- The state's fiscal year begins on July 1 and ends on June 30.
- The timeline below is approximate; the process can finish quickly, or it can be protracted.

September – December (preparation)

- All state agencies and executive offices prepare their respective budget plans and submit them for review to the Governor's Executive Office for Administration and Finance.
- The executive branch usually holds public budget hearings to collect input from agency staff, members of the public and advocates.
- In December, the Governor, the House Ways and Means Committee, and the Senate Ways and Means Committee review the state's revenue and economy to estimate how much money can be spent in the coming year. This estimate is called the Consensus Revenue Estimate and will be used by the Governor, the House, and the Senate to prepare their respective budgets.

January (Governor's budget)

- The Governor is required by law to submit their budget proposal to the House of Representatives by the fourth Wednesday in January. If they were recently elected, they have five additional weeks.
- The Governor's budget proposal is commonly referred to as "House 1" in the first year of a legislative session or as "House 2" in the second year of the legislative session.
- The Governor's budget is non-binding and gives the legislature and the public an indication of the Governor's spending priorities. The House and Senate are not obligated to adopt the Governor's budget figures or priorities when they begin preparing their own budgets in the spring.

February and March

- The legislative budget process begins in the House of Representatives, with that chamber releasing and then approving its version of the budget first, followed by the Senate.



- However, the Senate can, and sometimes does, work on its version of the budget at the same time that the House is working on its version.
- Members of the House of Representatives communicate their priorities to members of the House Ways and Means Committee and House leadership as part of the draft budget preparation.
- Before the House Ways and Means Committee releases its budget, they conduct public hearings throughout the state.

April

- House Ways and Means presents its budget to the full House where it is debated, amended, passed, and sent to the Senate for consideration.
- The Senate begins its budget process. Members of the Senate communicate their priorities to members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee and to the Senate leadership.
- The Senate is not bound by any prior appropriations figures, including those in the Governor's budget proposal or in the House's version of the budget, although they will review them both.

May

- The Senate Ways and Means Committee conducts public hearings on the budget throughout the state.
- Because all revenue proposals must originate in the House, if the House did not propose new revenues in its budget, the Senate cannot add new revenues to its budget.
- The Senate Ways and Means Committee presents its budget to the full Senate where it is debated, amended, and passed.

June

- If the House and Senate versions of the budget are not identical, they must compromise to pass one budget for the state.
- The Conference Committee, comprised of 3 members of the House and 3 members of the Senate, is formed to negotiate the differences between the two budgets. One member of the minority party must be appointed by the House and the Senate to the Conference Committee.
- This part of the process can be very difficult and time consuming. These negotiations are usually very private, and the members of the Conference Committee are not usually accessible.
- The Conference Committee reconciles the differences between the House and Senate versions of the budget and produces one budget that is then presented to both the House and the Senate for a vote.



- The House and Senate can only vote for or against the budget in its entirety. No further amendments are allowed.
- The House and Senate pass the budget and send it to the Governor for signature.
- The Governor has 10 days to review the budget. They have the option of signing it into law, vetoing it, or, after 10 additional days, allowing it to become law automatically without signing it.
- The Governor also has line item veto authority and can veto entire line items, reduce the amount in a line item, and/or strike line item language. The Governor cannot add additional money to a line item.
- The full legislature (House and Senate together) needs a 2/3 vote to override any of the Governor's vetoes.

July

- The final budget is called the General Appropriations Act (GAA).
- The new fiscal year begins on July 1st. If a full budget for the fiscal year has not been passed by the legislature and approved by the Governor by this date, the two branches typically agree to pass a 1/12 monthly budget to allow state government to continue to operate.

Additional budget resources

Massachusetts Legislature – Current and Prior Budgets

- <https://malegislature.gov/Budget/GovernorsBudget>
- Follow the budget process and view prior year's budgets

Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center – Budget Resources

- <https://massbudget.org/state-budget/>

Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center – Budget Browser

- <https://massbudget.org/budget-browser/>
- Research specific line items and view budget history

