Useful Information About the State House

- All 40 senators and 160 representatives at the State House are elected for two year terms. If they want to continue in their position, they must run for re-election every two years. Regular elections are held in even numbered years, for example in 2012, 2014, 2016.

- The mailing address for all lawmakers at the State House is:

  State House  
  Boston, MA 02133

- To learn the name of your State Representative and State Senator:

  o Call your city/town hall

  OR

  o Go to the website:  
    https://malegislature.gov/Search/FindMyLegislator. This website also provides a profile of every legislator, including email addresses.

- To learn more about the State House go to the website:
  http://www.state.ma.us/legis/

- Main State House Number: 617-722-2000. This connects you to any lawmaker you wish.
The Massachusetts State Budget Process

DTA, DHCD, DPH, etc. create department budgets, which are given to the Executive Offices for approval

January

Governor

February - March

House Committee on Ways and Means

House Floor

June

Conference Committee

Governor

April - May

Senate Committee on Ways and Means

Senate Floor

July

State Budget
How a Bill Becomes Law

Milestones:

— The bill filing deadline is the first Wednesday of December in even numbered years and the first Wednesday of November in odd numbered years.

— Joint committees must hold hearings and report out all bills by the fourth Wednesday in April.

— "Late filed" bills submitted after the fourth Wednesday in April must be reported out of committee within ten days of their submission.

These three rules set some of the more important deadlines associated with the legislative process—though the legislature can and will suspend its own rules at any time.

The Three Reading Process chart on this page will help citizen lobbyists "follow the papers" through the often murky process. Every bill must pass through each step—even, if for just a few seconds, while the rules are suspended.

At each step there is somebody—a legislator, a staff person, a House or Senate clerk—who is accountable for the physical custody of the paper on which the bill is printed. Good lobbyists check in with the custodian of the papers at least every few days (sometimes every few minutes) while managing the campaign to move the bill forward.

A non-controversial bill will generally follow a predictable timetable that includes a hearing in early spring a month or so in the Ways and Means committee, about a week in Second Reading, a month in Third Reading, then on to the opposite chamber for another month or two.

There is no predictable timetable for controversial bills.
State Budget Process

July — October
Departments under the Governor prepare their budgets, sometimes hold hearings, and then submit their budget to the Executive Office of Administration and Finance (A&F)

October — November
A&F reviews budgets submitted by the departments and recommendations to the Governor on how much each department's budget should be

November
Governor makes final budget decisions around mid to late November

January
Governor publicly releases his budget recommendations as a budget bill called House Bill 1

February — April
Budget reviewed by House Ways & Means committee, modifies it, and reports out its version to the full House; House Ways & Means usually holds hearings for public comment

April
House debates and votes on budget

April — May
Senate Ways & Means reviews budget, modifies it, and reports out its version to the full Senate. Holds some public hearings, too.

May — June
Senate debates and votes on the budget

June
Conference Committee made up of House and Senate members meets to negotiate the differences between the budget versions, and a compromise version ("Conference Report") is voted on by House and Senate

June 30
Governor signs budget
The call you make to a lawmaker can make a difference

I WAS heartened to read that John Cluverius said his data are limited and represent only one study about the ineffectiveness of constituents sharing their opinions with lawmakers ("Don't bother calling Congress," Ideas, May 21).

My experience as a social worker and advocacy trainer has been very different. Yes, lawmakers are inundated with information. At the State House, 6,000 to 8,000 bills are considered during each two-year session. And the annual state budget contains thousands of items.

No matter how well intentioned, nobody can be an expert about, or even be familiar with, all these issues. Legislative aides, advocacy groups, the media, lobbyists, and legislative colleagues all offer perspectives. But only constituents can vote for state lawmakers, all of whom are up for reelection every two years.

My observations of lawmakers' responsiveness to constituents' messages is different from that of Cluverius. One suburban lawmaker, for example, had never heard of a state-funded homelessness prevention program until she received phone messages from 12 constituents. She contacted one caller for more information.

Lawmakers do listen to constituents, at least some of the time.

Cluverius stresses that constituents sharing how a policy affects them or others can be persuasive. This is an excellent message both to the thousands of volunteers who help provide vital services and to the many people who receive them, or suffer when they are missing. They have unique viewpoints. Anyone who cares about a subject that impinges on people and communities can urge lawmakers to remedy its root causes.

Miriam Stein
Arlington

*The writer is the author of “Make Your Voice Matter with Lawmakers: No Experience Necessary.”*

https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/letters/2017/05/27/the-call-you-make-lawmaker-can-make-difference/dZnen1YQKtOu2wozlJKl1J/story.html