

Social Justice in Action: Advocacy at the State House

Dec. 10, 2008

Glossary of Terms.

Act

A bill that has been signed into law by the governor.

Acts and Resolves

A compilation of the bills and resolves enacted and passed by the legislature and signed by the governor. Bound in a volume on a yearly basis.

Adjournment

Termination of daily session.

Adverse Report

A committee recommendation that a matter ought not to pass.

Bill

Document accompanying a petition, usually asking for legislative action of a permanent nature.

Committee on Bills in the Third Reading

A committee of three which is empowered to examine and correct bills and resolves prior to their final reading in the Senate or House, resolutions prior to their adoption, and amendments to bills, resolves and resolutions adopted by the other branch and before the body for concurrence.

Concurrence

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

Conference Committee

Committee consisting of three members from each body (one senator and one representative acting as chairmen) appointed by the legislative leaders to resolve differences between the two bodies with regard to specific matter. Failure of the committee to agree or failure of one body to accept the committee's recommendation results in the appointment of a new conference committee.

Daily List

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

Emergency Preamble

A preamble to a bill setting forth the facts constituting an emergency, and the statement that the law is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, safety or convenience. Matters with emergency preambles become law immediately upon approval by the governor. Either the governor or the legislature may attach a preamble.

Enactment

Final passage of a bill by the House or Senate.

Engrossed Bill or Resolve

Final version of a bill or resolve before the House or Senate for final action after being typed on special parchment by the Legislative Engrossing Division and certified by the clerk.

Favorable Report

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

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.

General Laws

Legislative act applying generally to the Commonwealth and its citizens.

House and Senate Rules

Rules of order and procedure adopted by that branch at the beginning of each biennial session.

Informal Sessions

Meeting designated by the Speaker of the House and Senate President to consider reports of committees, enactments, 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 a specified number of 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 quarter of the General Court, sitting in joint sessions by two consecutively elected General Courts, can be placed on the ballot.

Joint Committees

Twenty-one committees, consisting of six senators and eleven representatives, responsible for holding public hearings and reporting on all legislative matters referred to them.

Joint Rule 10

Rule ordering that all matters referred to joint committees be reported out of committees by the fourth Wednesday in June of the first annual session of the General Court. If the matter is referred to committee after June 15 of the first annual session of the General Court, it must be reported out within 10 days, excluding Sundays and holidays.

Joint Rule 33

Rule allowing the alteration, suspension or rescision 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.

Joint Rules

Rules for the governing of the two bodies adopted by both branches.

Lay on Table

To temporarily lay aside the consideration of a specific 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 can be made only in the Senate.

Legislative Bulletin on Committee Work

A complete 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 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.

[Massachusetts General Laws](#)

All of the laws of Massachusetts of a general and permanent nature as embodied in the Official Edition of the Massachusetts General Laws (which are updated on a monthly basis), together with all amending and related general statutes subsequently enacted down through the current session of the General Court.

Money Bill

A Bill that transfers money or property from the people to the Commonwealth, i.e., a bill that imposes a tax. These bills must be taken up in the House of Representatives first.

Order

Formal motion in writing, not requiring the governor's signature, which is temporary in nature and is used to establish investigative committees, to change rules and for other parliamentary actions.

Orders of the Day (Calendar)

Listing of most matters to be considered by the Senate and the House at each sitting.

Outside Section

A section of an appropriation bill that may deal with an existing line-item in an appropriation, but may also amend an existing law or create a *new* law

Override

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

Pairing of Votes

Procedure allowed in the Senate only, whereby a member, before the vote is taken, announces to the Senate that he or she has paired his or her vote with an opposing vote of an absent member. The two votes do not affect outcome of the final tally.

Pass a Resolve

Final passage of a resolve by the House or Senate.

Petition

A request describing the nature of the proposed legislation and the objects sought by it, signed by the petitioner, and accompanied by a draft of the bill or resolve embodying the legislation proposed.

Pocket Veto

A veto resulting from the governor's failure to sign a bill following prorogation or dissolution of the General Court. Because the session has ended, the bill will not automatically become law after ten days and the General Court has no opportunity to override the veto.

Point of Order

Challenge to the breach of order or rule.

Proposal

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

Prorogation

Termination of a legislative year by agreement of the governor and both legislative bodies.

Quorum

Twenty-one members in the Senate, eighty-one members in the House. Quorum is set by rule.

Recess

Temporary delay in proceedings.

Reconsideration

Motion to reconsider a vote on action previously taken. Any member may propose reconsideration and if the motion prevails, the matter is voted on again. Must be moved prior to entering upon the *Orders of the Day* on the next legislative session.

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.

Report of Committees

Recommendation on a legislative matter by the committee to which it was referred.

Resolution

Documents which may or may not accompany a petition expressing an opinion of the sentiment of one or both branches of the General Court, used for congratulations, for memorializing the Congress of the United States regarding public questions, etc. Resolutions do not require the governor's signature.

Resolve

Document accompanying a petition, usually asking for legislative action of a temporary or immediate nature; e.g., establishing temporary investigative commissions.

Senate and House Journals

Records of proceedings in each chamber for each legislative day, including matters considered, amendments offered and votes taken.

Special Law

Legislative act applying to a particular county, city, town or district, individual or group of individuals and not general in nature.

Standing Committees

Eight permanent committees in the Senate (Administration, Ethics and Rules, Ways and Means, Bills in Third Reading, Long-Term Debt and Capital Expenditures, Post Audit and Oversight, Science and Technology, Federal Financial Assistance and Steering and Policy) and twelve in the House (Rules, Ways and Means, Bills in Third Reading, Ethics, Long-Term Debt and Capital Expenditures, Homeland Security, Medicaid, Science and Technology, Post Audit and Oversight, Personnel and Administration, Steering Policy and Scheduling, Floor Division,) which serve their respective legislative bodies separately.

Substitution for an Adverse Report

Procedure by which a committee's adverse report is overturned. The original or a new but very similar bill, resolve or resolution is substituted for the adverse report.

Veto

Governor's objection in writing to legislation enacted by the General Court. The legislation is returned to its branch of origin.