

How Laws are Made



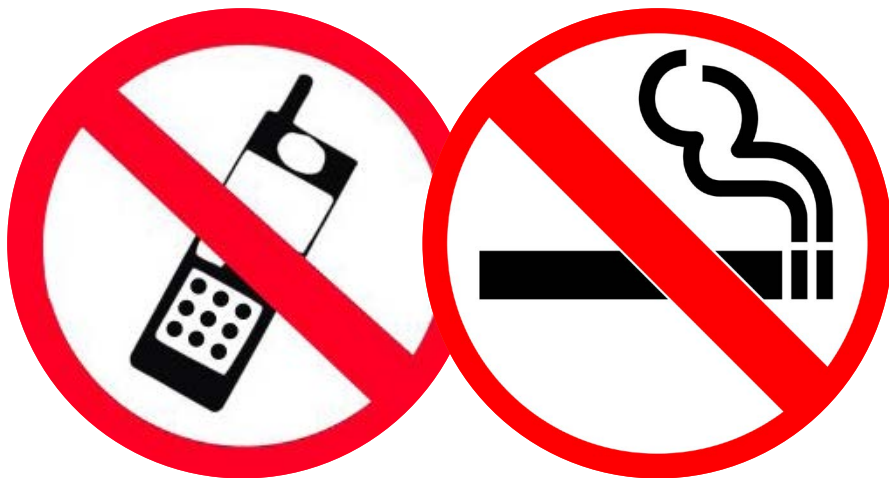
MASSACHUSETTS
ADVOCATES *for* CHILDREN
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How Laws are Made

Making a law takes a lot of steps. The first step is that someone has an idea for a new law. The idea could be for anything. People usually think their ideas for laws are for the good of all people.

The idea could be making it against the law to drive and use a cell phone.

It could be against the law to smoke in public buildings.



It could also be a law so that students with disabilities have the right to go to school.



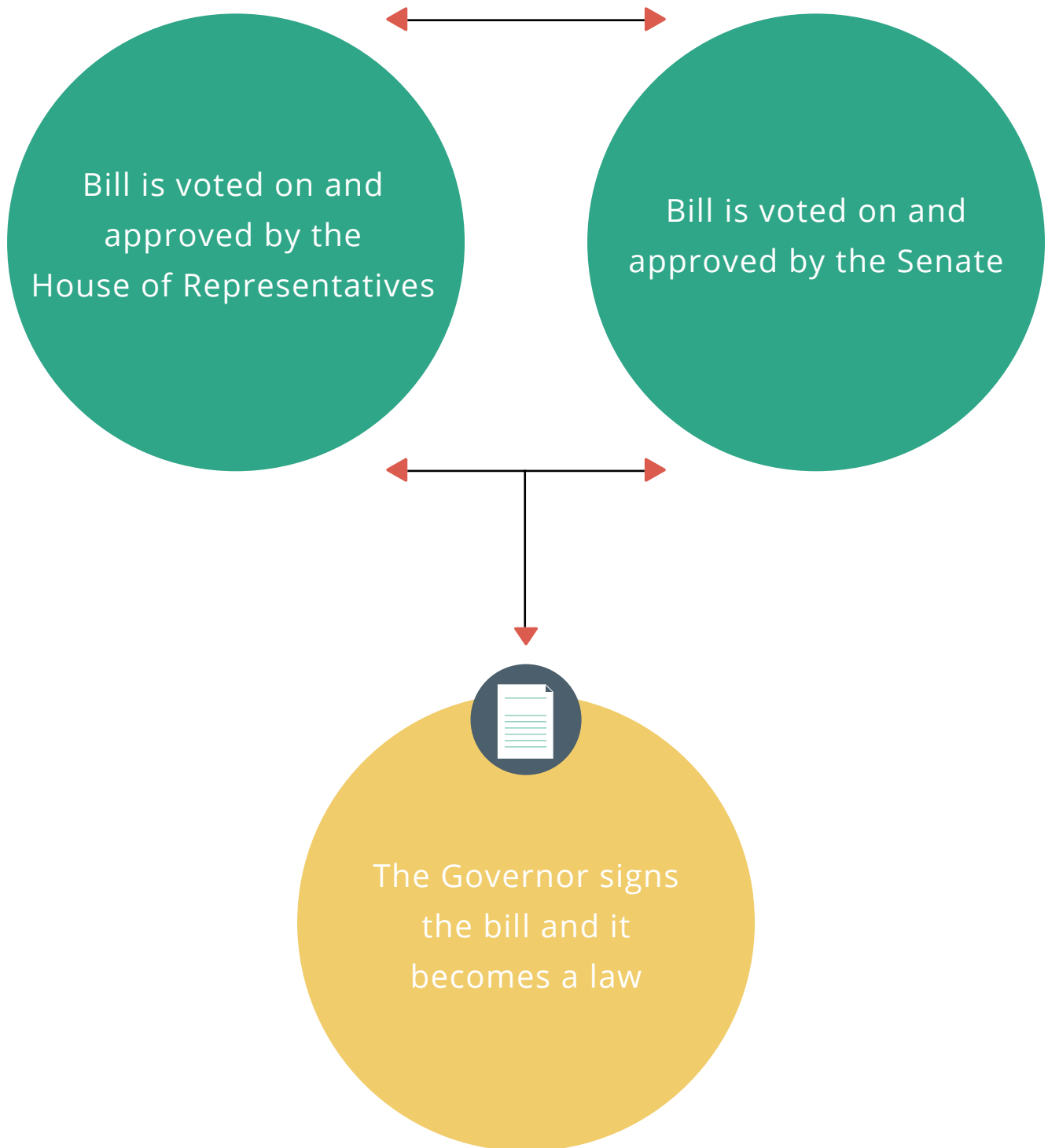
A lot of senators and representatives have to vote “yes” for an idea (or bill) to become a law. It is hard to make a new law because so many people have to vote “yes”. If a bill is voted “yes” by only some of the people then it doesn’t become a law. This happens a lot.

There are three main steps for a bill to become a state law. These steps are:

- 1 The House of Representatives has to vote for the bill to pass.
- 2 The Senate has to vote for the bill to pass.
- 3 The governor has to sign the bill. When the governor signs the bill it becomes a law.



How a Bill Becomes a State Law



What are the steps to make a law?

Example: The Transition Specialist Law

After each step there is an example of how MAC's transition specialist bill became a law. The MAC examples will be on a green page. This will show you the path this bill took to become a law!

A little information about transition:

There is a federal special education law that says schools have to give older students with disabilities transition services. Schools need to help students to get ready to leave school. This help is referred to as transition services. But many schools were not doing this. MAC worked to make a new law that was about schools having a transition specialist.

Transition means going from one thing or place to another. A specialist is someone who knows a lot about something. A transition specialist is someone who knows a lot about transition services for students with disabilities who will be leaving high school.

Examples: Transition Services



Learning how to take the bus



Getting a job with the support of a job coach



Learning how to use an ATM machine

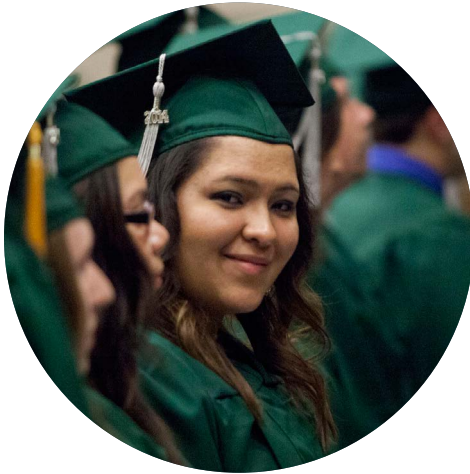


Learning how to find an apartment



Transition services get a student ready for what they will do after high school. Some people will want to get a job after high school. Some people will want to go to college or a trade school.

Others will want to live in an apartment with friends, or at home, or in a group home. School districts must provide students with disabilities the transition services they need so that they can get ready for these things after high school.



These are the steps to make a law:

Step 1. Idea for a new law

First people have to write down their idea for the law. They have to write what they want the law to do and say. What they write is called a bill. The bill has to go through many steps before becoming a law.



MAC Transition Specialist Law: Idea for a new law

The MAC Massachusetts transition specialist law started out as an idea. People told us about transition problems. Some examples of transition problems are:

- Schools not doing evaluations to find out about student's transition needs.
- Schools not providing transition services.
- Schools not giving transition aged students a chance to learn in the community.

We heard a lot from people about problems with transition that called us for help. We heard from students that our lawyers helped. We also heard from people during the workshops we did for parents and teachers.



Transition is very important for older students. This is how MAC got the idea to make the transition specialist law.

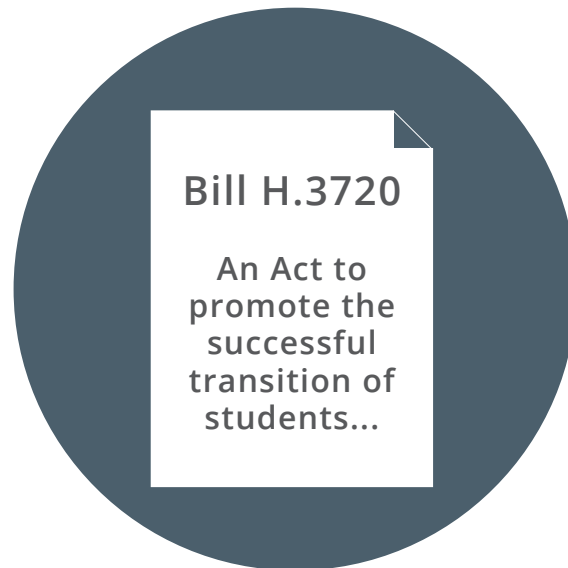
Step 2. A bill gets a sponsor in the State House

After the idea for a law is written down it has to have at least one sponsor.

A sponsor is a state senator or state representative who wants a bill to become a law. A bill can have more than one sponsor. They are called co-sponsors.

A senator or representative sponsors bills that are important to them and their voters. It is better to have more sponsors because it shows that a lot of people will vote for the bill.

Each bill gets a number.



MAC Transition Specialist Law: Bill is filed by a sponsor

Representative Tom Sannicandro sponsored the transition specialist bill and filed it in the State House.

This is a picture of Tom Sannicandro:



More than 50 other state senators and representatives co-sponsored the transition specialist bill.

The bill got the number H.3720

Step 3. The bill goes to committee and hearing

Committee

After a bill is written down, it goes to a committee of lawmakers that know a lot about what the bill is about.

A committee is a smaller part of a larger group. This smaller group of senators and representatives knows a lot about a subject. For example a bill about clean water would go to the committee that knows about clean water. A bill about schools would go to an education committee. This committee studies the bill to decide what they like and don't like about it.



Hearing

There is a public hearing for all bills in front of the members of the committee to find out what voters think of the bill.

Anyone can come and speak to the committee about the bill at the hearing. This is called “testifying”.



People or groups can testify if they like or if they don't like the bill.

If they like the bill then they will explain why they think it is a good idea for the bill to become a law.

If they don't like the bill then they will explain why they think it is a bad idea for the bill to become a law.

Hearing

The committee votes after listening to the people talk about what they like or don't like about the bill.

If they vote "yes", then the other senators and representatives will vote on the bill next.

If the committee votes "no" the bills are said to "die" in committee. They cannot become law.



This is a picture of what a hearing can look like. The people sitting behind the desks are legislators. They are senators and representatives. The people sitting at the table sitting next to each other are testifying.

MAC Transition Specialist Law: Committee and Hearing

Committee:

The transition specialist bill went to a committee after it was written. This committee was the Education Committee. It went to this committee because they know a lot about education.

Hearing:

Then there was a hearing. Many young adults, parents, and teachers testified at the hearing, talking about why the law was so important. They asked senators and representatives on the Education Committee to vote “yes” for the transition bill.

Other people testified at the hearing and said the bill was a bad idea. They asked lawmakers on the Education Committee to vote “no”.

This is a link to see a video of the hearing. It shows people talking that liked this bill: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dkw2J7QdXms> 

After the hearing was over the committee voted. They voted yes. This showed they thought the bill should become a law.

MAC Transition Specialist Law: Committee and Hearing

Event:

MAC held an event the day of the hearing. Over 100 people that liked the bill came. These people included youth with all types of disabilities (autism, physical, intellectual) and their parents.

At the State House event, House sponsor Representative Tom Sannicandro spoke to the newspapers and TV stations. He gave a short talk about the importance of transition services for youth with disabilities.

Adults and youth with disabilities spoke briefly to the group. Then they met in front of the Governor's office. Youth with disabilities wore T-shirts that said "Transition = Jobs".



Petition:

MAC worked with other groups to start a petition before the hearing. A petition is a list of names of people that want something to happen. Then they give the petition to the person in charge.

Many parents, students, and teachers signed the petition asking senators and representatives to vote yes and make the transition specialist bill a law. A lot of names meant that a lot of people liked the bill. The senators and representatives understood how important this bill was because there were so many names on the petition.

MAC then made copies of the petition and gave it to senators and representatives so they could see how many voters thought the bill was important.



The youth with disabilities showed a 100 foot petition to Governor Patrick.

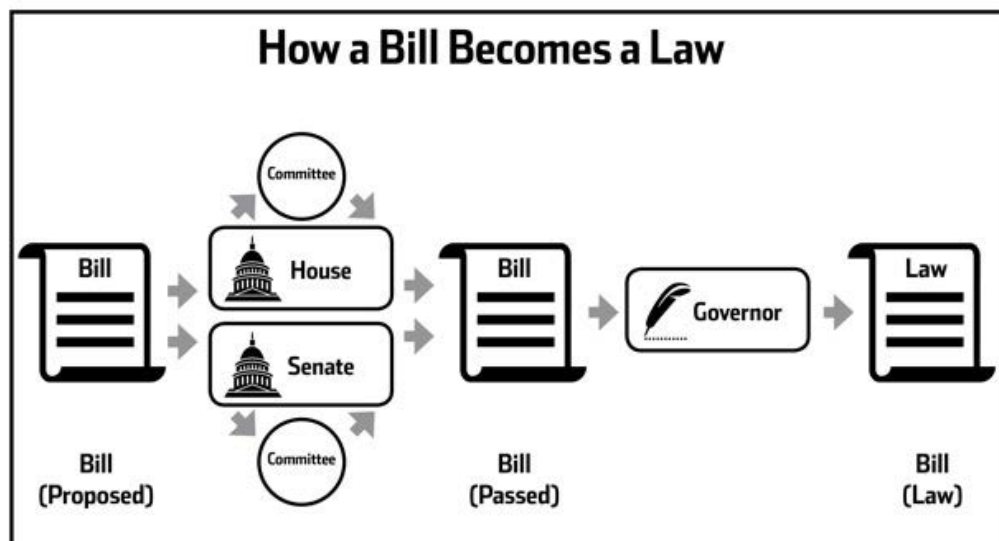
Step 4. Next steps, more votes

The bill has to be voted on by more people after the first committee votes yes. These people are in other committees.

The bill also has to be voted on by all of the members of the House and by all of the members of the Senate after the first committee votes yes. It takes a long time.

Sometimes the House and Senate both vote “yes” on a bill but they may change some of the words. Making changes to a bill is called making amendments.

The bill goes to another committee if the House and Senate can’t agree on what words the bill should use. This committee is called a conference committee.



MAC Transition Specialist Law: Next steps, more votes

After the hearing the bill went to other committees. For example it went to the House Ways and Means Committee. The Ways and Means Committee looks at how much money the bill would cost if it becomes a law. They voted yes.

After it went to other committees it went to the members of the House of Representatives. They voted yes.

Then the bill went to the Senate and their committees. They voted on it. They voted yes.

The transition specialist bill was voted on and passed by both the House and the Senate.



Step 5. The bill is sent to the Governor

The bill goes to the Governor if both the House and the Senate vote yes for the bill.

When the Governor gets the bill he or she can:

1. Sign the bill and it becomes a law.
2. Veto the bill and it will not become a law. Veto means that the bill has been refused.

The bill can still become a law even if it gets vetoed. If it gets vetoed, the House and Senate can override the veto. Override means to cancel. This can happen if most of the House and Senate vote to override the bill.

If the House and Senate override the Governor's veto, then the bill still becomes a law.



MAC Transition Specialist Law: The bill is sent to the Governor

Governor Deval Patrick signed the transition specialist bill and it became a law!



Steps for a bill to become law



It can take long time for a bill to become a law. A law starts out as someone's idea.



It needs a sponsor to become a bill. A sponsor for a bill is someone from the legislature – a senator or representative.



Once it has a sponsor it goes through more steps before it becomes a law. It goes to special committees.

And there are public hearings so people can say what they think of the bill. a law.



Then the bill gets voted on many times. The senate and the House of Representatives all vote yes if they want the bill to become a law. If they all vote yes, then the bill goes to the governor.



When the governor signs the bill it becomes law.