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How the Budget Becomes Law

Every year the Governor and the General Court (Legislature) of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts carefully develop the budget for the upcoming fiscal year. The fiscal year runs from July 1st until June 30th of the following year. Outlined below is the process for how the budget is developed each year. You can also follow online by visiting www.malegislature.gov and click on “Budget.”

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Step 1: Governor’s Budget

The annual budget process begins each year in January. By the third Wednesday of January the Governor must submit a proposal with their budget recommendations which is named House 1 if it is the first year of the legislative session or House 2 if it is the second year of the legislative session.

Step 2: House Ways & Means Budget

Following the Governor’s proposal, the House Committee on Ways and Means begins to form their own proposal. This process includes the Joint Committee on Ways and Means attending hearings across the state to hear recommendations and testimonies. The House Committee on Ways and Means considers both the Governor’s proposal and the information from the hearings to create and release its own recommendations.

Step 3: House Debate

Following the release of the House Ways & Means Budget the entire House of Representatives has a period to consider amendments to this budget and debate for their inclusion. This is an important and busy time as all Representatives and their staffs are working hard to ensure that the needs of their constituents are addressed in the budget. Debate takes place over the course of a week, generally in late April, where Representatives work late into the night as they work to ensure the budget includes priority investments.

Step 4: House Budget

Following this House Debate, the House of Representatives approves a final version that includes changes made during the debate. This version is sent to the Senate to be considered.

Step 5: Senate Ways & Means Budget

Once the Senate receives the House Budget, the Senate Committee on Ways and Means considers these recommendations and the Governor's recommendations. The Senate Committee on Ways and Means then releases its own recommendations which will be deliberated by the Senate body.

Step 6: Senate Debate

Similar to the House of Representatives, the Senate body has a period to consider amendments and debate their inclusion in the final budget. This is a very busy time for the Senate as each member works to ensure their constituent's needs are met in the budget.

Step 7: Senate Budget

Following the Senate debate, the Senate approves a final version that includes changes made during the debate. This version is sent to a Conference Committee to review.

Step 8: Conference Committee

A conference committee is a committee comprised of three members from each branch of the legislature. The goal of this committee is to resolve differences between the House of Representatives recommendations and the Senate recommendations. The Conference Committee will report a final bill which will be voted on by the House and Senate for final approval.

Step 9: Governor's Actions

After the budget has been approved by the legislature, the Governor has ten days to either approve or veto the budget. The Governor has many options during this time, they can

- Approve the entire budget
- Veto the entire budget
- Veto specific line items
- Reduce specific line items
- Veto outside sections
- Submit changes as an amendment to the budget

Step 8: Legislative Overrides

The Legislature can override the Governor's vetoes with a two-thirds vote in each branch. The House must vote first to override any vetoes before they may be considered by the Senate.

Step 9: Final Budget

Following any Legislative overrides, the budget is finalized and is commonly referred to as the "General Appropriations Act" for the upcoming fiscal year.