



LEGISLATIVE SESSION REPORT

Massachusetts Legislature 2023



In 2023, the Massachusetts legislature has a Democratic majority across the three chambers, including newly-elected Governor Maura Healey. This is the first time such a majority has occurred since 2015. The Massachusetts state house has biennial legislative sessions that begin in odd years. As such, this year is the start of the 2023–2024 legislative session. Ahead of the session, legislators announced their priorities.

FY 24 BUDGET

Massachusetts lawmakers passed the Budget for Fiscal Year 2024 on August 1, 2023. This budget was historic for many reasons, notably:

- The millionaire's surtax revenue, totaling \$1B, was split between education and transportation initiatives. Of this total, funding was divided between the following initiatives:
 - \$523M earmarked for education
 - \$477M earmarked for transportation

- \$5M to research a "means tested" MBTA fare
- The budget included \$50M in expansions to community college access, including:
 - \$20M for MassReconnect, a new initiative by Governor Maura Healey
 - \$18M to cover the cost of attending community college nursing programs
 - \$12M to make community college accessible by the fall of 2023, an initiative by Senate President Karen Spilka
- Under the budget, universal free school lunch is now a permanent program.
- Lawmakers reintroduced an eviction protection program, called Chapter 257. The program will pause eviction cases for tenants who have a pending application for rental aid, which lapsed earlier this year.

Governor Healey signed the budget on August 9, 2023, with one veto and eight

amendments. The veto removed \$205M in one-time funding from the state.

Many priorities were not included in the final budget. These priorities will be included in future iterations of the annual budget.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES SO FAR IN 2023

- Equity Initiatives
- Education
- Guns
- Environment
- Abortion/ Reproductive Rights
- Housing

EQUITY INITIATIVES

Massachusetts legislators aimed to lead on progressive initiatives. Many such initiatives were introduced and advocated for this year, including:

HD. 3616 requires that government agencies provide translation services in the 12 most common languages in the state. It also mandates the continued collection of data, helping agencies best serve their constituents. This act was a response to the lack of accessible resources throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

S. 1191 requires that employers and job posters provide a pay range for each available position. Should employers fail to comply, they will be fined. The bill was introduced to address gender- and

racially-based pay gaps. Currently, white women earn 80 cents for every dollar earned by white men. Latina women earn 45 cents for every dollar earned by white men.

EDUCATION

Notable education bills include H. 544, The Healthy Youth Act, and H. 474/S. 287, An Act Relative to Student Representative Voting Rights.

H. 544 has been introduced in the legislature for several years now. Many members anticipate that it will pass this year. The bill will require that all public schools offering sex and relationship education ensure that curricula is:

1. Medically accurate
2. Comprehensive
3. Age-appropriate
4. LGBTQ-inclusive

The Act would also require that schools periodically provide data on their sexual and relationship curriculum. The data will inform updates to curriculum frameworks every ten years.

Activism by young students led to the introduction of H. 474/S. 287. These bills, introduced in their respective chambers of the state legislature, aim to guarantee fair representation of students' perspectives. They would require that school committees have two student representatives with full voting power. Student representatives will be selected



by their peers through an election. As of August 2023, only one student representative in Massachusetts has full voting power.

GUNS

Massachusetts has some of the strictest standards regulating firearms. Yet, the state experiences significant disparities in who is affected by gun violence. In recent years, Boston agencies have reported an increase in 'ghost guns'. Gun violence also remains high in historically disinvested neighborhoods. This year, the house introduced HD. 4420, An Act Modernizing Firearm Laws, with many gun law changes in its text. The bill was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety. It will be further debated and discussed later this year.

ENVIRONMENT

The Massachusetts legislature has been very active in introducing legislation addressing climate change. One popular bill is H. 872, The Polluter Responsibility Superfund. If passed, the bill would hold companies responsible for their impacts on the environment. Companies responsible for pollution will pay to reverse their impacts on the environment. Over 25 years, it's estimated that these measures would generate \$75 billion.

The legislature also introduced H. 3272, An Act to Increase Regional Transit Accessibility in the Commonwealth. The bill would create a permanent fund to build and sustain public transportation. It aims to decrease reliance on cars by providing expansive and accessible public transport.

Additionally, the state house introduced H. 3203, an Act Relative to the Future of Clean Heat in the Commonwealth. The bill aims to ease the transition from fossil fuel to renewable energy. The bill would require the implementation of geothermal heating throughout the state. This transition would be critical to the state meeting its 2030 climate goals.

ABORTION AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

In the year since the Dobbs v. Jackson Supreme Court decision revoked the constitutional right to abortion, Massachusetts has passed many laws protecting abortion access. In March of 2023, Governor Healey issued an executive order preserving access to the abortion pill mifepristone. In the executive order, Governor Healey stated:

“The action we are taking today protects access to mifepristone in Massachusetts and protects patients and providers from liability. In Massachusetts, we stand for civil rights and freedom. We will always protect access to reproductive health care, including medication abortion.”

Legislators have also introduced bills to protect patients, aiming to ensure that patients have equitable access to reproductive healthcare. Further, legislators have introduced measures aiming to protect consumers from deceptive advertising. H. 377 has gained attention as the debate around abortion maintains political saliency.

HOUSING

The HOMES Act, S. 956, was introduced in 2020 and remains a conversation in the legislature. The bill would seal eviction records, protecting tenants from punishment or retaliation related to their eviction history.

S. 864/H. 1731 would ensure that low-income tenants and owner-occupants receive legal representation in eviction proceedings. In 2022, 86% of landlords in Massachusetts had representation in court, while only 11.5% of tenants were represented.

CONCLUSION

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has only begun its two-year legislative cycle. Throughout the remainder of the session, legislators will continue to work on a wide range of bills and lead national movements on salient issues like gun violence and climate change. The Massachusetts legislature prides itself on its leadership in national conversations, and the state will be one of many to watch in the coming months.

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