



Legislative Calendar + Process Overview

The Maine State legislature works on a two-year calendar (“biennium”). The first year is known as the *first regular session* or *long session* (January – June) and the following year is called the *second regular session* or *short session* (January – April).

YEAR 1:

First Regular Session

(First Wednesday of December through the third Wednesday in June):



The legislature **opens its first session on the first Wednesday of December**. You can find the official calendar on the legislature’s [website](#).



December Cloture Deadline – Cloture is the name for the deadline to submit requests for bills to be considered during the legislative session. The Legislative Council (which includes House and Senate leadership) sets the date for cloture (it’s often towards the end of December for the first session). You can call the [Revisor’s office](#) to make sure you know the date of cloture.



The legislature usually has its **first meeting** of the new year on the first Wednesday after the first Tuesday of the new year.

Advocacy tip: Plan an event on the opening day of the Maine legislature!

The legislature considers as many as 2,000 bills each two-year session. With so many issues to consider, it is important to build awareness of your priority bill(s) right at the start of the session. The first day of session is a symbolic day to build some energy around issues of concern. Share a sign-on letter or petition, a video message, or plan a Grassroots Lobby Day at the State House to bring their attention to your issue. We also encourage you to contact your legislator to welcome them into the new session and to remind them of the priorities their constituents set for them. There are many creative ways to kick-off an advocacy effort and focus the legislature’s attention on your issue.



January – April – Bills are **introduced, revised** and sent to **committees** throughout this period. **Public hearings** are scheduled.

Advocacy tip: Organize a coffee hour with legislators!

Some groups organize legislative coffee hours early on during the session to catch legislators before their day starts and introduce them to key bills. This can be an effective way to identify key champions of your issue. This can be in person or virtual.

Advocacy tip: Write a letter to the editor (LTE) about your issue!

Writing a letter to a newspaper and getting it published is a great way to build support for issues that are important to you. Remember to write as if the readers know nothing about your topic. The more to the point it is, the more likely it is to be published and your letter has the biggest impact when it is connected to current events and issues. Newspapers post their guidelines for submitting an LTE on their websites or in the opinion section of the newspaper.



January – June – After a public hearing on a bill, the legislative **committee votes on the bill**. There is often a **majority and minority report** that comes out of the committee. The majority report is given by the group of legislators from the committee with the most votes on a bill. They explain why they support the bill and any changes they've made to the original bill. The minority report is given by a group of legislators with the least votes on a bill. It explains their reasoning for rejecting the bill and any changes they'd like to see the full legislature make to the bill. You can find out how a committee voted on a bill by looking up the bill by its bill number [here](#) and then looking at Committee Information. The committee clerk is also a resource when you are looking for this information.

The committee reports are sent to the **legislative bodies for debate and a vote**. The debate and vote will start in the Senate if its lead sponsor is a Senator and in the House if the sponsor is a Representative.

Advocacy tip: Host a day of action!

Reserve meeting space at the State House, start the day with a training and then find legislators where they are meeting. Use this opportunity to help members connect with their own legislators as well as legislative leaders. Holding these events early in the session is an effective way to highlight key issues for legislators.

Advocacy tip: Contact your legislator and encourage others to do the same!

After a bill is voted out of committee, it's important that we contact key legislators regularly. The legislature considers a new slate of bills daily and we need to make sure decision makers know that people are watching their vote on our bill. This is a time when we highly encourage Mainers to make calls, send emails and send social media messages to their legislators. "In-district" meetings - sometimes in person, some virtual - are also a way to connect more personally with your legislator during this time.



After a bill is passed, **the Governor has 10 days (not including Sundays) to 1. sign the bill; 2. Veto the bill; or 3. Allow the bill to become law without her signature.** The legislature can choose to hold a veto day after the veto deadline to consider any vetoes by the Governor.



A bill officially becomes law 90 days after adjournment, unless it is an emergency bill which goes into effect right away.



The first regular session of the Maine State Legislature **adjourns (ends) by law on the third Wednesday of June.** This statutory adjournment date is often pushed out several days to finish final negotiations and votes. With a 2/3 vote of those present and voting in each body, the legislature can extend statutory adjournment by 5 days, up to 2 times in both the first and second sessions.



The State Budget



Maine operates on a **biennial budget** that sets spending levels for state government, which means that the Maine legislature develops a budget for two years at a time. **Maine's fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30.**



The constitution requires that Maine's budget must be **balanced.** For state government to continue to run without a shutdown, **the biennial budget must be in effect by July 1st.**



If a bill, including the budget, has an emergency preamble and two-thirds support in both bodies of the legislature, it goes into effect immediately. If it passes with only a majority in either body of the legislature, it does not go into effect until 90 days after the legislature adjourns. This is an important part of budget negotiations and dynamics.

Many programs are funded through the state's General Fund. The revenue to fund these programs comes from income and sales tax, lottery ticket sales, fees and fines as well as federal funds. TANF, SNAP, LIHEAP, and other federal programs have large federal funding components. The Fund for a Healthy Maine and a tax on hospitals helps to pay the state funded portion of Medicaid in Maine.



The Governor is required to submit a biennial budget by the Friday following the first Monday in January of the first regular legislative session if the governor is already in office.

Advocacy tip: Bring attention to your priorities with a day of action!

The Governor releases their budget the first week of January. The budget determines our priorities as a state. It is important to learn what is in the budget. Sometimes budgets will include proposals that you want to oppose or support. You will have an opportunity to do that through the budget process. You may also want to make the case for something that is important to you or your community that is not in the budget and you want lawmakers to include. The Governor's budget is a proposal. Legislators – and the constituents who elect them – can propose changes to this budget as it goes through the legislative process.

The Governor and/or the legislature may also consider a **Supplemental budget** in either the first or second sessions of the legislature to amend an existing biennial budget. A new administration can adjust the existing budget from a previous administration based on expenses for the current year.

Appropriations and Financial Affairs (AFA) is the committee that is responsible for the budget. The committees of jurisdiction – those that have authority over certain government programs and services – also get to make recommendations to the Appropriations Committee. For example, the Health and Human Services Committee (HHS) will sit in on hearings with the AFA committee when the bills are related to HHS programs. Then the HHS Committee will recommend that certain lines in the budget be approved or rejected or additional spending added. See a great primer on the Maine State budget process [here](#).

Advocacy tip: Speak out for a fair budget!

The long session is also when the biennial budget is drafted, debated and passed. In addition to hearings on bills, there are hearings about the budget. These are important opportunities for advocates to weigh in on where the state's resources should be going to improve the wellbeing of all Mainers.

YEAR 2:

Second Regular Session

(first Wednesday after the first Tuesday of January through the third Wednesday in April)



At the end of the first regular session there are bills that are **“carried over”** to the next session. A **new bill** needs to get a majority of votes by the Legislative Council to be allowed into the second regular session (technically they are supposed to be “emergency” bills).



Cloture for the Second Regular Session is *Often Early Fall* The date of cloture is set by the legislative council.



The legislature opens its second session the first Wednesday after the first Tuesday of January. During the second regular or short session, the legislative process moves more quickly.



January – April: Public hearings are scheduled and held.

The second regular session of the Maine State Legislature **adjourns by law on the third Wednesday of April.** This statutory adjournment date is often pushed out a few days or sometimes even weeks to finish final negotiations and votes. Sometimes the legislature will recess and come back in to finish their work. Legislators are often in a rush to adjourn so they can go back to their districts to campaign for the General Election.

See more about Maine's legislature [here](#).