



*"The Only Union for Police Officers and 911 Dispatchers"*

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## **A LETTER FROM LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR AND FIRST VICE PRESIDENT JOHN E. NELSON**

A new legislative session has begun and there are many bills that could have a profound effect on the Massachusetts Coalition of Police. One bill filed by Representative Zlotnick has been getting a huge amount of attention, and with that, has come quite a bit of misinformation surrounding the timeframe relating to the legislative process. We thought this might be a good opportunity to explain a little about the legislative process and the timelines that go with it.

For our older members, just think back to the days of School House Rock and the "I'm Just a Bill" song. They truly simplified the process for us because it would have lost all of the entertainment value if they took a deeper dive while trying to present it to a nation of youngsters. For our younger members, I am hoping at least a couple of the vintage School House Rock productions have made it onto a screen at some point in your life. This is going to be a little more detailed than our childhood song but know that it is a very detailed and intricate process designed to not pass legislation.

At the beginning of the session, we reached out to legislators with proposed bill language on a variety of topics. They will examine the proposed language and determine whether or not they want to file the bill for us. Once a bill is filed by a legislator, and depending on the importance of the bill, the filing legislator will seek other legislators to sign on as co-sponsors. Bills that receive the most co-sponsorships seem to get a fair amount of attention from leadership, but co-sponsors are just one little piece of the puzzle. The bills are docketed and then eventually assigned a bill number depending on which body it came from, the House or Senate. In this session, there are already over 6,000 bills filed. This is a rather sharp increase. In past years, they averaged between 3,500-4,500 bills filed by the initial filing deadline. Last session ended with 8,212 bills filed in total, including those bills that were filed late. Would you like to take a guess as to how many were passed into law? A grand total of 515, or stated another way, 6%.

Once the bill gets its number, they then start getting assigned to the appropriate committee. Many of our bills end up in the Public Safety, Public Service or Judiciary Committees. The committee will then start scheduling hearings for each bill. This can be a tedious process. Some of the hearings can last several hours. Depending on the day, you can sit for hours just to testify on one bill. Most of the committees limit the time you can speak to three minutes. The Massachusetts Coalition of Police usually submits written testimony, along with our live testimony, to ensure that the committee is aware of our position on any given bill. After hearing the testimony, the committee then determines if the bill is favorable or not favorable. If it is favorable, it moves along to the next step in the process. Depending on the subject of the bill, it may go to another committee.



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An example would be a bill that could potentially cost the Commonwealth money, that bill would then go to the Ways and Means Committee. It will be examined to determine the fiscal impact on the Commonwealth and again voted on as to whether it should continue in the process.

At this point you may be thinking, okay, so that should take a week or two to accomplish. Remember, this is government, and nothing moves that quickly, unless the government wants it to!!!!!!

Once the bill makes it through the committee process, it then starts its path through three readings in either the House or Senate, again depending on where it originated. Once it makes it through two readings with much debate and many amendments, it then goes to the committee for third reading, where leadership controls which bills are released to move on through the process. If the bill is fortunate enough to make it through third reading, then it is engrossed and moves on to the opposite chamber. If it originated in the House, it would now go to the Senate and vice versa. The bill will have to go through a similar process in the opposite chamber engaging in three readings, debate, and amendments on its road to being engrossed by this body. If your bill is lucky enough to make it through this grueling process, it is likely that there were different amendments made by either body. If there are differences in the engrossed bill between the House version and the Senate version, then your bill goes to a Conference Committee. In the Conference Committee, three members from each body sit and debate the differences until they come up with a bill that both sides can agree. And finally, once the Conference Committee agrees, it can move on to the Governor for signing. Oh, but wait, there's more.

The Governor can decide to sign the bill into law as presented, he or she can veto the bill entirely, or he or she can send it back with recommended changes. Obviously, if it is your bill and you are satisfied with how it came out of the process, you want the Governor to sign it into law. If the Governor vetoes the bill, the legislature has a chance to overturn the veto with a two-thirds vote by both bodies. If the Governor sends it back with recommendations, the Conference Committee gets to continue their deliberations to see if they are going to incorporate the changes. If they do agree to make changes, they have to bring it back to each body for another engrossment before sending it back to the Governor for his or her signature.

This explanation is only scratching the surface as to what actually happens at the State House and is presented simply as an explanation of the process and its intricacies. Many people think they are playing checkers at the State House, when actually they are really playing chess. We have had a number of members calling asking us about a particular bill and hoping for a timeframe as to when we think the bill could potentially pass. We are hoping that you may see by this explanation that it is nearly impossible to answer that question. There are too many variables that go into the process to begin to guess when it could pass.

We advocate and lobby for every single bill we file and for any that will have a positive impact on our membership that were filed by others. We also spend quite a bit of time lobbying against bills that will hurt our membership. We have five lobbyists working for your interests and we continue to bring our members a very successful legislative program.



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We also want our local leaders and every single one of our members to understand that we cannot be successful without the assistance of each and every one of you. We need your help when called upon to call your legislators and let them know where we stand on an issue. Legislators like hearing from people in their districts on issues that impact them. This model had great success in our efforts in dealing with the Police Reform Bill. Thousands of people reached out to their legislators and your voices were heard. Keep up the good work, and we look forward to continuing our work together.

If you have any questions about a particular bill, or any questions surrounding our legislative efforts, please feel free to contact your Area Vice President.

Stay safe and healthy,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'John Nelson' in a cursive script.

John E. Nelson, First Vice President  
Legislative Director