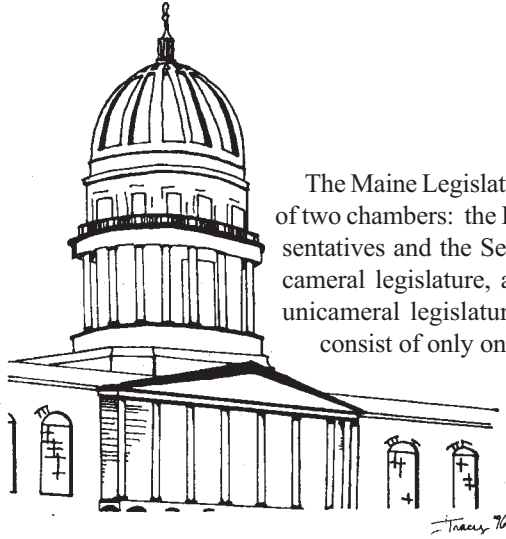


How The Legislature Is Organized



The Maine Legislature is composed of two chambers: the House of Representatives and the Senate. It is a bicameral legislature, as opposed to a unicameral legislature which would consist of only one chamber.

THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The Maine House of Representatives has 151 voting members plus non-voting Penobscot and Passamaquoddy tribal representatives. Representatives are elected every two years, except the Passamaquoddy representative, who serves for four years. All bills concerning taxation originate in the House.

Speaker of the House

The presiding officer of the House of Representatives is the speaker whose responsibilities include: naming representatives to committees; calling the House to order; announcing daily business; recognizing representatives to speak; recognizing all motions to vote; and signing all legislation passed in the House. He or she is elected to a two-year term, and selection is typically controlled by the majority party.

Clerk of the House

The House Clerk is elected by House members for a two-year term. He or she is responsible for keeping records of daily legislative business, reading bills before the House, and notifying committees of new appointments and of bills referred. The Clerk is also in charge of all legislative documents.

THE SENATE

The Senate has 35 members. Senators are also elected for two-year terms.

President of the Senate

The Senate President is the presiding officer and has responsibilities similar to those of the House Speaker. He or she is elected by members for a two-year term. The Senate President is next in line of succession to the governor, and serves in the event of the governor's death or disability.

Secretary of the Senate

The Secretary of the Senate has responsibilities similar to those of the House Clerk. In addition, the secretary acts as a liaison between the Legislature and the governor. The secretary is elected for a two-year term.

Majority and Minority Leaders

The majority and minority parties in the House and Senate each select a leader and assistant leader. The Democrats typically use the term whip for the assistant leader. The majority party is the one that has more than half of the members.

Committees

The Legislature has 17 Joint Standing Committees with members from the Senate and House. Committees are organized by subjects such as Natural Resources, Labor and Taxation. Each has 13 members: three from the Senate and ten from the House. The committees hold public hearings, analyze and evaluate bills and make formal recommendations to the full Legislature. Each bill must be reported out. Each committee has a clerk and an analyst who are nonpartisan staff.

Special Committees

The legislature often creates temporary Joint Select Committees and Commissions to study complex issues and develop legislation. In addition to legislators, other citizens may be asked to serve on Commissions.

Legislative Council

The Senate President, the Speaker of the House, majority and minority leaders of both chambers and their assistant floor leaders form the 10-member Legislative Council. It oversees the State House and its grounds, manages the legislative budget, and administers support services such as the nonpartisan Revisor of Statutes, Office of Policy and Legal Analysis, and Office of Fiscal and Program Review. The Council is responsible for consideration of bills submitted after deadline during the first session. In the second session and special sessions, a majority vote of the Council is required for a bill to be introduced.

Party and Other Caucuses

The House and Senate each have a Democratic and Republican caucus. There is also a Green Independent Caucus in the House, but it has only one member. The caucuses sometimes take positions on bills and may meet several times a week during the session. Caucuses play a key role in shaping positions taken by party members. Several informal caucuses have also emerged, centering on identities, such as labor, women, or rural legislators, or on issues, such as sprawl. These non-party caucuses are organized to varying degrees and have different functions according to the interests of the members.

Legislative Calendar

Each Legislature has two regular sessions. The first regular session begins on the first Wednesday of January after the general election, and may run until statutory adjournment, the third Wednesday in June. The second regular session starts the following year on the first Wednesday of January and may run until the third Wednesday in April. Either session can be extended by a two-thirds vote from both chambers.

Special sessions may be called by the governor or by a majority of legislators of both parties. They usually last only a few days.