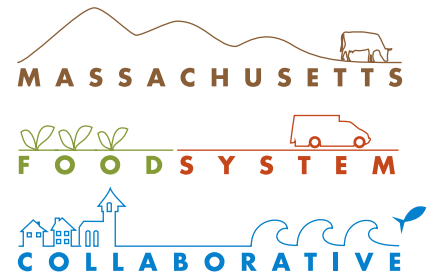


# Advocacy Tips for Massachusetts Food System Stakeholders



Many of the laws that regulate the local food system are made by the Massachusetts legislature. Legislators have to make decisions on many issues and they can't be experts in all of them - they need your help! They count on you to keep them informed on what's happening in their communities, and they need to hear from you when policy changes or funding are needed. Your relationship with legislators should be regularly maintained so they know they can rely on you as a subject matter expert and advocate for their communities.

## Building relationships with policymakers

- **Get to know your legislators.** Find out who your legislators are at <https://malegislature.gov/Search/FindMyLegislator>. Learn about what their priorities are by reading their bios and seeing what committees they serve on and what bills they have introduced.
- **Don't only reach out when you need something.** Invite your legislators to your events or to sit in on a program, send them your newsletters, and follow them on social media.
- **Relationships with legislators' staff are also important.** They are often more accessible as well as very knowledgeable about issues and very influential with the legislators they work for.
- **Even supportive legislators need to hear from you.** You want them to do more than vote correctly - you want to help them become a champion for your issue, urging their colleagues and leadership to support it as well.
- **Let your legislators know that you appreciate their leadership** when they've done something that supports your work or the issues you care about.



## Providing input on proposed legislation

- When submitting testimony on a bill or budget, **written testimony is critical.** Testifying orally at a hearing is important as well, but limiting. Make sure to send written testimony to committee chairs and the bill's sponsor.
- **Provide constructive feedback.** If you can't support a bill as it is written, offer testimony that explains what changes would best meet the needs of your community and allow you to support it.
  - **Tell a personal story** about how a program or investment affects someone's life, business, or community. This has more of an impact than repeating data or talking points others are already sharing.
- If a legislator or a staffer asks you a question that you're not sure about the answer to, promise to get back to them or connect them with someone else in your community who has the answer. **Don't make something up!**
- It's rare for a bill to pass the first time it is introduced. It often takes two or even more sessions. **Don't get discouraged!** This gives you more time to advocate, and more time to recruit supporters in your community and in the legislature.

Find more advocacy tips at <https://mafoodsystem.org/projects/legislation/>

# Opportunities for input on legislation...

## At this stage of the process...

**A bill is proposed.** A senator or representative files a bill. Other legislators sign on in support as co-sponsors.

**A hearing is held.** The bill is assigned to a committee and a public hearing provides opportunities for input.

**The committee moves the bill.** The committee votes to support the bill, referring it to another committee for its consideration, or it rejects the bill.

**Changes are considered.** The second committee debates the bill, proposes and considers changes and amendments, and approves the revised version.

**Full chamber votes on the bill.** The House or Senate votes to approve or reject the bill. If approved, the other chamber considers it next.

**The Governor signs or vetoes the bill.** The governor can sign or veto the bill, or propose changes and return it to the legislature.

## ...advocates can:

Help the legislator with drafting the bill, and urge other legislators to cosponsor the bill after it is introduced.

Submit written testimony to the chairs of the committee, and testify at the public hearing.

Submit written testimony to the chairs of the committee.

Submit written testimony to the Speaker of the House and the Senate President.

Submit written testimony to the Governor.

# ...and during the annual budget process.

**Fall.** Departments and agencies submit their budget requests to the governor.

Meet with commissioners and secretaries to discuss budget priorities, and submit letters to the Governor in support of those asks.

**Early January.** The Governor proposes their budget.

**January-April.** The House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means hold hearings and develop their budget proposals.

Write to, call, and meet with committee chairs and staff to make the case for funding priorities.

**April (House) and May (Senate).** Committees on Ways and Means release their budget drafts, legislators propose amendments, and the chambers pass final budget proposals.

Urge legislators to introduce amendments for budget items that were not included, solicit cosponsors for those amendments, and urge Ways and Means Committee Chairs to support those amendments.

**June.** Conferees from both chambers meet to reconcile the two budgets and pass a unified proposal.

Submit letters to conferees, supporting your budget priorities.

**By June 30.** The governor signs, vetoes, or vetoes parts of the budget, and also suggests changes for the legislature to consider.

Urge the governor to support their budget priorities.

*These timelines reflect a broad overview, and the process often is not as linear as indicated here. See the Collaborative's [Cultivating Good Food Policy: A guide to advocacy campaigns for Massachusetts food system stakeholders](#) for further advocacy tips and additional details on the legislative process.*