

Going to the State House can seem like going to a foreign country in which people are guided by unusual customs and speak an unfamiliar language. Knowing a few key words and phrases can often make a visit much more pleasant and productive. What follows is a brief list of terms commonly used in the legislative process. This list was excerpted with permission from the Legislator's Handbook, published by the Office of Policy & Legal Analysis under the authorization of the Legislative Council. This glossary is not exhaustive. It contains the terms most commonly used and most important to the citizen lobbyist. For more legislative terms, particularly those of the technical sort, visit <http://www.state.me.us/legis/opla/glossary.htm>

Amend: To alter or modify a law, bill or instrument. Amendments may be made to a bill in a committee, or in the full House or Senate when it comes up for consideration.

Caucus: Conference of members of a legislative group to decide on policies or strategies. Legislators from the same party often caucus. For example, all the House Democrats or Senate Republicans may meet together.

Cloture: Deadline for submitting complete requests for bills and resolves for consideration in a legislative session. The cloture date is earlier than most citizens would expect. For example, cloture for the session beginning in January 2005 was in early December 2004!

Committee Reports: The actions that a committee takes on a bill; essentially a recommendation to the full House and Senate. The most common committee reports are: Ought to Pass; Ought to Pass as Amended; Ought Not to Pass.

Conference Committee: Legislative committee composed of three members of each house, sometimes appointed to attempt to reconcile differences between the houses with respect to a proposal.

Fiscal Note: Information on the fiscal impact of a measure, printed after the substantive provisions of the measure. Any bill affecting state revenues or appropriations or allocations must have a fiscal note attached to any favorable committee report or floor amendment. The size of a fiscal note – in other words, the amount it will cost to implement the bill – often determines the bill's fate.

Indefinite Postponement: Motion made on the floor of a legislative chamber to defeat a measure; frequently, takes the form that “the (bill) and all its accompanying papers be indefinitely postponed.”

Session: Period during which the Legislature assembles and carries out its business. There are two regular sessions in each two-year legislative term. During the first regular session (held in odd-numbered years just after each election), a legislator may submit legislation on any topic before cloture. In the second regular session, the Maine Constitution limits bills to budgetary matters, bills in the Governor's call, direct initiatives, legislation derived from committee studies during the interim and legislation of an emergency nature. The Legislative Council reviews each legislator's

requests for legislation in the second regular session to determine whether it meets constitutional requirements.

Speaker of the House: The presiding officer of the House of Representatives elected by the members of the House. The Speaker is generally the most powerful and influential member of the majority party. His or her opinion carries great weight with other members of his/her party.

Sponsor: A legislator who proposes a measure to the Legislature.

Statute: The general term for acts of the Legislature. Statutes are distinguished from other bodies of law, such as department rules, constitutional provisions and common law developed by the courts.

Table: To delay action. A measure may be tabled until later in the day, until another certain date, or unassigned,

i.e., to an indefinite time. Bills are often tabled as an attempt to defeat them without a vote on the bill directly.

Unanimous consent: The procedure by which action is taken without a vote, also referred to as an action “under the gavel,” or “under the hammer.” Items about which legislators agree, but which they believe to be unpopular, are sometimes passed by unanimous consent so that no record is kept of how each legislator voted.

Veto: Disapproval of an act, typically by the governor. If the governor vetoes a measure, a two-thirds vote of each house is required to override it.

Work session (working session, workshop): A meeting of a legislative committee to discuss committee business or to work on bills. “COMMITTEE REPORTS” are developed at work sessions.

