

PRESS RELEASE  
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BOSTON, MA . . . Amid widespread concern about the functioning of the Massachusetts State House, the bipartisan Coalition to Reform Our Legislature announces the filing of two bills in the 2025-2026 legislative session, one, H.D. 1802, to create offices of legislative research and fiscal analysis, and the other, S.D. 1301, to reform the legislative stipend system. Both reforms address extreme outlier features of the State House that contribute to its dysfunction.

### **Bill to Create Research and Fiscal Analysis Offices.**

Massachusetts is unique among the states in not having a dedicated office or committee tasked with providing research and other services to legislators. CROL's bill calls for the creation of two offices to be headed and staffed by non-partisan, independent experts in policy analysis, bill-drafting, and econometrics, including revenue forecasting and analysis of the fiscal impact of proposed bills. To ensure independence, the directors of the offices would be appointed for five-year terms.

"Over fifty years ago, the legislature recognized that the volume and complexity of legislative matters before the legislature requires a 'high degree of specialization on the part of legislative members', and that a research staff is an 'invaluable and indispensable tool in the efficient performance of the legislative process.' The need for impartial, professional research and economic analysis has only grown more acute in the decades since the legislature made that finding and yet our representatives have less access to quality, professional assistance now than they did decades ago," said Jeanne Kempthorne, lead author of the bill and a founding member of CROL.

The recent report on the State House by State Auditor Diane DiZoglio recommended the resurrection of the old legislative research bureau, which became defunct in the 1990s after a public outcry against patronage hires. The Boston Globe editorial board recently lauded the State Auditor's recommendation as "one of the best ideas in the report."

Former chair of the state Republican Party, Jennifer Nassour, a member of the Coalition, said, "We anticipate that this bill will empower rank-and-file legislators to help develop sound policy and will make them less reliant on lobbyists for special interests to do the basic work of legislating we elect our representatives to do. We believe we have built safeguards into the bill to ensure that the abuses of the past will not be repeated and that the minority party will have a meaningful say in hiring the directors of the new offices."

### **Bill to Reform the Stipend System**

The second bill would significantly reduce the number and amount of the stipends available to the Speaker, Senate President, and minority party leaders to dole out to favored legislators. The legislative stipend system in Massachusetts is by far the largest in the country. Currently, the Speaker and Senate President control \$4.3 million annually in extra pay for leadership and committee positions, many of which involve little or no extra work or responsibility. Many committees are assigned no bills and never meet.

In addition to this wasteful use of taxpayer dollars, the lure of extra pay and fear of losing it have made the stipend system a powerful tool by which legislative leaders exercise control over rank-and-file. Reducing legislators' financial dependence on stipends controlled by House and Senate leaders will free them to represent their districts actively and independently without risking loss of pay.

Former state representative Jonathan Hecht, a founding member of CROL and lead author of the stipend bill, remarked, "Reform of the stipend system is critical to making our legislature more truly representative, responsive, and effective. Not only would this bill reduce leadership's control over legislators' livelihoods, it would also link pay to performance. Chairs would only be eligible for stipends if their committees are assigned 50 or more bills. And both they and leadership would only be paid their stipends if those committees handle all bills in a transparent, accountable way through public meetings, mark-ups, and votes. This will go a long way toward curtailing the current practice in Massachusetts of lawmaking behind closed doors."

Another major goal of the bill is to reduce pay inequality among legislators, which is also the largest in the country. The gap between the highest and lowest paid legislators would be cut by nearly two-thirds by reducing stipends for top leaders and providing a new basic stipend for rank-and-file legislators. The result would be to make it feasible for more potential candidates to consider serving in the legislature while still reducing the overall cost of the stipend system by more than \$500,000 a year.

CROL was established in 2021 as a bipartisan reform effort following the issuance of *The Massachusetts Legislature: Democracy in Decline*, the report of the Legislative Reform Working Group convened by Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts. PDM chair and founding member of CROL Peter Enrich stated, "These bills represent only two of many needed reforms in the State House. Empowering rank-and-file legislators to do the important work we send them to Beacon Hill to do is a start. There is much to be done. Ultimately, the goal is a more democratic, transparent, accountable, effective and efficient legislature."

For more information on CROL, go to [malegreform.org](http://malegreform.org).

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