

Summary of an Act to Strengthen Representation and Promote Democratic, Transparent, and Efficient Lawmaking (SD1301)

This bill, put forward by the Coalition to Reform Our Legislature (CROL), aims to improve the pay structure and incentives for Massachusetts legislators by reforming the stipend system. The stipend system in Massachusetts is an outlier. The Senate President and House Speaker currently control \$4.3 million in stipends for leadership and committee positions – 68 in the Senate and 94 in the House – that can boost a legislator’s annual pay by 10% to 120% above the base salary of \$82,044. Most of these stipends were created in the last 25 years.

In no other state are so many legislators dependent on their chamber’s leader for such a large share of their pay. This inevitably undermines legislators’ independence and is a major reason for the follow-the-leader culture in the Massachusetts legislature and its low levels of participation, transparency, and productivity.

The stipend system is also deeply flawed in other respects: 1) as the *Boston Globe* has reported, many of the positions that come with extra pay involve little or no extra work; 2) many of the stipends are tied to committees that report bills without public debate or votes, marginalizing rank-and-file legislators and keeping the public in the dark; 3) the pay structure is the most inequitable in the country, with some members earning \$50,000-100,000 more than colleagues who represent the same number of constituents.

The CROL bill replaces the current stipend statute (MGL ch. 3, sec. 9B) with a new statute that would:

- Reduce legislators’ financial dependence on stipends controlled by Senate and House leaders, freeing them to represent their districts actively and independently without risking loss of pay
- Link pay to performance – only provide stipends for positions that involve significant work
- Incentivize transparency and accountability in lawmaking by conditioning the payment of stipends on joint committees holding public mark-up sessions and public votes on every bill
- Provide adequate, equitable compensation for all legislators

Key provisions of the bill include:

- Reducing the number and size of stipends for leadership positions
 - 5 leadership stipends for the majority party and 4 for the minority party, eliminating stipends for other unnecessary, recently created leadership positions
- Providing stipends only for chairs of committees that do significant amounts of work
 - Chairs of joint committees to which more than 50 bills are referred by March 1 of the first year of session, eliminating stipends for committees with few or no bills
- Lower stipends for leadership and some chair positions that align with constitutional amendment CXVIII on legislators’ base pay, approved by Massachusetts voters in 1998
- Providing a stipend (not controlled by leadership) for other members of joint committees to compensate them fairly for the work of public mark-up sessions and votes. This would also improve pay equity and make the job of legislator financially feasible for more potential candidates.

If implemented in the 2025-26 session, the bill is projected to reduce the number of stipends controlled by the Senate President from 68 to 31 and the House Speaker from 94 to 31, bringing them closer to historical levels and practice in other states, while reducing costs by more than \$500,000 a year.