



Anatomy of Non-Compliance, #1: Joint Committee on Municipalities and Regional Government

How "written testimony only" hearings and missed deadlines create a legislative black box

Introduction

This brief examines the Joint Committee on Municipalities and Regional Government (MRG) as measured by the Tracker as of February 10, 2026 in the 194th General Court (2025–26). The compliance rate of MRG currently sits at 46.58%. This data brief explains how recurring process violations with respect to hearing notice and report-out deadlines prevent citizens from participating in the lawmaking process as it relates to the MBTA, zoning, and home rule laws.

I. Committee Overview

| | House | Senate |
|------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Chair | Jack Patrick Lewis | Rebecca L. Rausch |
| Vice Chair | Lindsay N. Sabadosa | John F. Keenan |
| | | |
| Compliance Rate | 46.58% | |
| Total Bills | 307 | |
| Summary Violations | 0 | |
| Report-Out Violations | 38 | |
| Notice Violations | 59 | |
| Vote Violations | 84 | |

The violations of MRG are fairly unique among the Legislative committees: most violations are based on timelines, rather than documentation. This data will shed light on some of the likely workflow-based explanations for why this is the case, and how this affects advocates using the Legislature site to track bills.

II. Pattern Analysis

The first violation commonly seen by bills passing through MRG comes in the form of hearing notice violations. According to the Joint Rules, committees must announce hearings 10 days in advance:

"All joint standing committees, and special joint committees of the Senate and House of Representatives, shall notify the Sergeant-at-Arms of the time, place and agenda of all public hearings and executive sessions. Notification to the Sergeant-at-Arms for public hearings conducted shall not be less than 10 days prior to the time of such meetings."

There are cases where all transparency requirements for a bill are met, but the hearing receives **zero days' notice**. Examples:

- S.2668, "An Act relative to the Monson select board"
- H.4784, "An Act providing for a town administrator in the town of Hopedale"
- H.4795, "An Act amending the charter for the town of Groton"

In each of these cases, hearings are announced the **day of**, with the following text:

"Hearing scheduled for [date] from [time] in Written Testimony Only"

This constitutes a hearing notice violation in the eyes of the Tracker:

- The Joint Rules do not outline any exceptions for types of hearings (e.g. written)
- Written testimony still takes time to prepare

There are also a number of report-out violations for House-origin bills. According to House Rules (which override the Joint Rules in this instance), committees have 60-90 days to make final reports on bills:

"The House chair of each joint standing committee shall make final report on all matters referred to and heard by their committee prior to the third Wednesday of December of the first annual session of the General Court by not later than 60 calendar days after the matter is heard; provided, however, that an additional 30 calendar days may be granted on a matter by the House chair who shall notify the Clerk of said extension."

Examples of bills which concretely fail this requirement:

- H.2340, "An Act repealing section 3A relative to MBTA communities"
- H.2305, "An Act reforming the MBTA Communities Act"

- H.2294, “An Act relative to voluntary municipal right of first refusal”
- H.2308, “An Act relative to multi-family zoning in MBTA communities”
- H.2338, “An Act relative to exemptions from MBTA community designations”

In each of these cases, the bill’s hearing was announced with a summary and with proper advance notice, but then was never reported out. Even if they were to all report out today, they would be extremely late, and thus still non-compliant.

III. Workflow Hypothesis

The MRG hearing notice violations uncovered by the Tracker seem to coalesce around bills of a similar type: local/municipal charter bills. These bills typically have limited controversy and narrow geographic impact. The pattern suggests that perhaps committees may be treating “Written Testimony Only” hearings as administrative formalities rather than genuine public hearings subject to the 10-day rule. The Tracker cannot, in good faith, reclassify these bills in spite of these facts, however; the Joint Rules do not distinguish between bill types, and citizens impacted by such bills are no less deserving of meaningful participation and advance notice for locally-scoped bills than they are for statewide bills.

The MRG report-out violations highlight why the Joint Rules were implemented in the first place: the ones highlighted above are all around controversial hot-button MBTA topics with strong advocacy on both sides, and letting deadlines quietly pass without resolution prevents the public from knowing where legislators stand on these important issues. The bills are effectively killed without timely, formal public notice. The fact that summaries were posted and hearing notice was respected indicates awareness of Joint Rule constraints, but selective adherence.

IV. The Gap

In tandem, these notice and report-out procedural violations create systemic, end-to-end opacity and uncertainty for constituents. When citizens cannot reliably prepare in advance for hearings, or see timely resolutions for controversial bills, they fundamentally lose access to both ends of civic participation. This creates a legislative “black box” where the Legislature may choose when to allow public discussion and when to alert the public to the outcomes they arrived at, making it difficult to meaningfully trust public perception of bills and legislators alike.

One step legislators of MRG could take today would be to either allow 10 days’ notice for written testimony hearings, or to hold formal hearings. If the concern is that a formal public

hearing for each bill would be prohibitively slow, the former would still promote compliance with the rules while keeping the workflow burden lower. As for report-out violations, MRG would simply need to arrive at and record decisions for the public. Failing to do so leaves Massachusetts voters in the dark come election time.

V. Accountability Context

| | House | Stipend | Senate | Stipend |
|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Chair | Jack Patrick Lewis | \$22,431 | Rebecca L. Rausch | \$22,431 |
| Vice Chair | Lindsay N. Sabadosa | \$7,776 | John F. Keenan | \$7,776 |

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Policy Area | Zoning, municipal charters, regional planning, municipal finance, land use |
| Time Range of Violations | May 2025 - Present |
| | |

The chairs and vice chairs of MRG cumulatively receive \$60,414 for holding these positions. The violations recorded by the Tracker for this committee span the full 194th session, and indicate consistent evidence of legacy workflows which have not been amended in light of the new Joint Rules implemented in 2025, specifically regarding timelines at the tail end of a bill's tenure within the committee.

Analysis based on bill-level metadata scraped from official public legislative sources as of February 10, 2026 using version 1.3.1 of the Tracker and version 1.0.5 of Stipends.

Deadline compliance is computed using a chronology-based algorithm applied consistently across all cases; irregularities in the underlying data make the resulting values standardized estimates rather than exact measures.

For further information collected by the Beacon Hill Compliance Tracker, please visit <https://beaconhilltracker.org/>.

For further information collected by Beacon Hill Stipends, please visit <https://beaconhillstipends.org/>.

For further questions, please contact info@beaconhilltracker.org.

Changelog:

Release: February 10, 1026

Change February 15, 2026: Corrected hearing violations from 114 to 59 (transcribing error; all related data and analysis is and was based on the correct number.)