Navigating the State Budget Process

Each year the Governor and Legislature work to craft the state’s spending plan. While the January-to-June period gets the most attention, the process of crafting the budget is an ongoing enterprise, giving Californians ample opportunity to stay engaged and involved year-round.

The Governor

The Governor has the lead role in developing the state budget. Each year, the Governor proposes a spending plan, which is introduced as the budget bill in the Legislature. The Governor can sign or veto the budget bill passed by legislators as well as other bills in the budget package that make policy changes related to the budget. The Governor can also reduce or eliminate individual appropriations using the line-item veto.

The Legislature

The Legislature – made up of the Assembly and Senate – reviews the Governor’s proposed budget and crafts its own version of the spending plan. The Legislature can maintain, modify, or reject the Governor’s proposals, with review occurring through each house’s budget committee and related subcommittees. The Legislature must pass the budget bill, but not other bills in the budget package, by June 15. The Legislature can override a Governor’s veto by a two-thirds vote of each house.

The Public

The public has various opportunities for input during the budget process. Members of the public can meet with officials from the Governor’s administration and with legislators and their staffs, testify before budget committees and subcommittees, and write letters of support and opposition. Through individual engagement or as part of coalitions, members of the public can express their budget priorities and areas of concern.

By June 15: Legislature must pass a balanced budget

By May 14: Governor releases revised budget proposal (“May Revision”)

By January 10: Governor releases proposed budget for next fiscal year, which begins on July 1

July 1: Start of the state fiscal year

After Governor signs budget: Legislature may override vetoes by two-thirds vote of each house.

February to early May: Officials from the Governor’s administration testify about the proposed budget at legislative hearings and develop the May Revision.

February to early May: Budget subcommittees in the state Assembly and Senate review the Governor’s proposed budget and begin to craft their versions of the annual spending plan.

Mid-May to early June: Legislative leaders and Governor meet to address outstanding issues.

Early June: Legislative leaders and Governor review the May Revision and move toward finalizing their versions of the budget in subcommittee hearings. A legislative conference committee may meet to resolve differences.

By May 14: Governor signs budget package and may issue vetoes.

Summer to fall: State departments and agencies develop budget proposals for the coming fiscal year and submit them to the Department of Finance (DOF) for review. Following a series of meetings, the Governor makes final decisions and the DOF prepares the proposed budget for release in January.

Summer to fall is also a good time for members of the public to get to know key legislative staff, educate them on particular issues, and suggest ideas that deserve a hearing in the year ahead.

Fall: Legislative leaders develop their budget priorities for the coming fiscal year.

July and following: Legislature may pass budget amendments and other changes to the adopted budget package, including in the next calendar year.

By January 10: Governor releases the Governor’s proposed budget for the next fiscal year, which is a starting point for the legislative process.

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