



January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Dear Neighbor,

Here is your copy of the most recent “Citizen’s Guide to Participation in the Wisconsin State Legislature”!

This guidebook has been produced by the Legislative Reference Bureau since 2013 as a way of giving citizens a step-by-step guide of the legislative process and information on being a involved member of our democracy.

Constituents like you have always been my top priority, and hearing from you on a range of state issues helps to inform me of important decisions in Madison. In my time as your State Representative in the 9<sup>th</sup> District, I have talked to countless residents around our community and have responded to thousands of questions and concerns.

I hope this guide can be helpful as you continue to participate in our democratic process. It has always been the people who make our democracy strong. The more informed the community, the stronger the democracy.

Moving forward, I appreciate your input on important state matters and encourage you to contact my Capitol office via e-mail – a quick, convenient, and cost-effective method of reaching me: [Rep.Zepnick@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Rep.Zepnick@legis.wisconsin.gov).

Further information about our district or my work can be found on the office website at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/assembly/09/zepnick>.

Sincerely,

Josh Zepnick  
State Representative  
9th Assembly District  
Wisconsin State Assembly



# A Citizen's Guide to Participation in the Wisconsin State Legislature

*Prepared by the Wisconsin Legislative Council Staff, 2015*

## Introduction to the Legislature

The Wisconsin Constitution states: *The legislative power shall be vested in a senate and assembly.* With these few words, the Constitution creates a bicameral legislature, that is, a legislature with two houses. The “legislative power” granted to the Legislature is the power to create, amend, and repeal laws. The two houses of the Legislature are the Wisconsin State Assembly and the Wisconsin State Senate. At the federal level, the legislative power is vested in the Congress, consisting of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate.

Wisconsin is divided into 33 Senate districts, with roughly equal populations, and each Senate district is divided into three Assembly districts. Thus, the Senate consists of 33 Senators and the Assembly consists of 99 Representatives. Senators serve four-year terms and Representatives serve two-year terms. In November of each even-numbered year, all 99 Representatives are elected. The terms of Senators are staggered, so half of the Senators are elected in one legislative election and the other half are elected two years later, in the next election.

## **FUNCTIONS OF THE LEGISLATURE**

### **LEGISLATION**

Law-making is the principal function of the Legislature, and it does this through legislation. Bills are the form of legislation used to create, amend, and repeal laws. Most of the laws are codified in the Wisconsin statutes, the state's legal code. Correspondingly, the bulk of bills make changes to the statutes.

In addition to passing bills, the Legislature adopts resolutions, which are used for a variety of purposes. The most important, but least often used, purpose is to amend the Wisconsin Constitution. Resolutions are also used to create, amend, and repeal the internal operating rules of the Legislature. In addition, the Legislature uses resolutions to express its views or

*Supporting Effective Lawmaking Since 1947*

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#### **WISCONSIN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

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sentiments on various matters. These include honoring members of the Armed Services killed in action; recognizing individuals who have made exceptional contributions to society; and urging Congress or others to take certain actions or to support certain policies.

### ***OVERSIGHT OF THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH***

In addition to making laws, the Legislature exercises oversight of the executive branch. It does this in at least three ways:

- The Joint Legislative Audit Committee oversees the work of the Legislative Audit Bureau, which conducts both financial audits of state agencies and program audits of state government programs. Frequently, a program audit is conducted when there appear to be problems in a program. The audit report recommends changes to the program to address problems found. If the problems are great enough, a program audit may lead to legislation to correct the problems.
- The Legislature sets the budgets for state agencies every two years, and the Joint Committee on Finance, assisted by the Legislative Fiscal Bureau, plays a large role in the biennial budget process. This process ensures that each agency's budget gets a complete review by the Legislature at least once every two years.
- A legislative committee or an individual legislator may, from time to time, ask a state agency to brief the committee or the legislator on programs administered by the agency, especially if there appear to be problems in the program. Again, these briefings can lead to recommendations for changes to a program or legislation to address larger problems.

### **LEGISLATIVE SESSIONS**

The word "session" is used in various ways with regard to the Legislature. The "biennial session" is the two-year cycle that begins after each election. A "floor session," also called a "floor period" in this context, is a period of one or more consecutive weeks when the Legislature is scheduled to meet. "Floor session" can also refer to a meeting of one house of the Legislature, on a particular day; in this context, this is also called a "daily session."

#### ***BIENNIAL SESSION***

A biennial session begins in the first week of each odd-numbered year. The first days of the new session are dedicated to the inauguration of the members and organization of the Legislature. In late January, the Governor submits his or her proposed state budget to the Legislature. While the Joint Committee on Finance begins work on the budget, other committees begin work on other legislation, and the Legislature will meet several times to act on these bills. However, the focus of the Legislature remains largely on the budget until its passage, usually in late June.

Following a summer recess, the Legislature returns to address the rest of its business for the session. Typically, from September until the following April, the Legislature meets for two- or three-week floor periods, separated by periods set aside for committee work. The last floor period for enacting legislation is usually in March or April, with one more floor period

scheduled after this for the limited purpose of considering gubernatorial vetoes of bills the Legislature has passed.

The Legislature does not meet again after the veto review floor period unless the Governor calls it into special session, or it calls itself into extraordinary session, to address legislation on a specific topic. The Governor may call a special session at other times, as well. In this case, the special session runs concurrently with the general session.

The period from the veto review floor period until the convening of a new Legislature the following January is often referred to as the “interim” or “study” period. The Legislature engages in two activities during the interim. First, it forms study committees to develop legislation for the following session; these study committees are described below. Second, the members return to their districts and run for re-election, after which the biennial cycle starts again.

### ***FLOOR PERIODS AND DAILY SESSIONS***

As noted earlier, floor periods are typically two to three weeks long, though some are longer. The Legislature usually meets on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. However, they do not hold daily sessions all three days in each week of a floor period. Rather, they meet when there is enough legislation ready for their consideration to warrant a session. In fact, it is not uncommon that one or both houses will meet only once or twice during a scheduled floor period.

## **ACTIVITIES OF THE LEGISLATURE**

### ***DAILY SESSIONS***

Daily sessions are when bills are debated and votes are taken. The public may observe these sessions, from the galleries in the Senate and Assembly chambers or on television or the Internet via the Legislature’s home page or the WisconsinEye public affairs network.

Daily sessions are very formal and follow a regular sequence of business. They are subject to many rules of procedure and decorum. Procedural rules are designed to ensure that legislation gets a thorough consideration and that all members have the opportunity to speak in debate and to offer amendments. However, rules may be suspended to expedite the process. It takes a two-thirds majority to suspend the rules, but it is often done by “unanimous consent”--if no one objects, then clearly the required two-thirds of the members approves the suspension.

The rules of decorum exist to ensure civility in the Legislature. The rule that is most evident, almost every time someone rises to speak during session, prohibits a member from addressing or referring to another member by name. If you are observing the Senate, you will hear everyone referred to as “the Senator from the \_\_\_ district;” in the Assembly, it is “the Lady” or “the Gentleman from the \_\_\_ district.”

Daily sessions begin with the Pledge of Allegiance, a prayer, announcements and various administrative matters. At this point, the house (Senate or Assembly) will recess for partisan caucuses. During these caucus meetings, the parties discuss the day’s calendar. They make

sure that their members know what the bills on the calendar are about and what amendments have been offered. They also discuss the positions that they, as a caucus, will take on each bill, although there is not a unified caucus position on all legislation. Many caucus meetings are open to the public, but some are closed, especially when the caucus is divided over a controversial issue.

The recess for caucuses may be brief, but they often take hours. When the house reconvenes, it considers amendments, first to its own bills and then to bills from the other house. This stage is called “second reading.” It then considers passage of bills, the stage called “third reading.” Once this business is completed and all actions have been messaged to the other house, the house adjourns for the day.

### ***STANDING COMMITTEES***

Standing committees are where a great deal of the Legislature’s work is done. They are created at the beginning of each biennial session, each with a specific area of jurisdiction; Senate committees generally combine several topic areas. These committees have at least three principal functions:

- To determine what legislation will advance through the legislative process. This is a power exercised largely by the committee chair, in deciding what bills to schedule for hearings.
- To educate committee members about the bills. Committee members become the experts in the Legislature on the bills that come before their committees.
- To prepare bills for action by the full house.

Standing committees hold two kinds of meetings: public hearings and executive sessions. At a public hearing, committee members learn about bills in the committee through testimony presented by the author, experts, lobbyists, and members of the public who have an interest in the bills. At executive sessions, committees prepare bills for consideration on the floor by voting to recommend adoption of amendments they consider necessary and to recommend passage of the bills they want to see advance in the process.

With very rare exceptions, standing committee meetings are open to the public, and anyone can testify at public hearings. Many, but not all standing committee meetings are covered by WisconsinEye.

### ***STUDY COMMITTEES***

During the interim between sessions, special committees, appointed by the Joint Legislative Council, meet to develop legislation for the following biennial session. They are formed to study and develop legislative solutions for problems that are either technically or politically challenging. They consist of legislators with an interest in the subject and members of the public selected based on their interest or technical expertise in the subject. Because they bring all interests together to study a problem, the legislation they develop often has broad support and a good chance of passage in the next session. While many states use study committees,

Wisconsin is one of the only states where members of the public sit on the committees as full, voting members.

## **WHO'S WHO IN THE LEGISLATURE**

There are many people doing various tasks during any legislative proceeding. To follow the action, it is helpful to know who is who.

### ***DAILY SESSIONS***

In the Assembly chamber, members sit in two blocks of seats divided by an aisle. Republican representatives sit on the side nearest the windows; the Democrats sit across the aisle from them. The Senate chamber has two concentric rings of seats. The majority party members sit in the outer ring, and the minority party members sit in the inner ring.

The most prominent person in the room during daily sessions is the presiding officer, who stands at the podium in front of the members. In the Senate this is the President; in the Assembly it is the Speaker. In front of the presiding officer is the Chief Clerk, who helps the presiding officer run the session and, with his or her staff on either side, records the events of the session and formal actions of the body.

The next most prominent persons in the chamber are the majority leader and minority leader, who have seats facing the presiding officer. These individuals guide the session by making motions on behalf of their caucuses, asking for adoption or rejection of amendments, passage or tabling of bills, etc.

Various persons are off to the sides of the chamber. These include legislators' personal staff, members of the press, and messengers (or "pages"), who distribute documents and deliver messages to members, run errands, and provide other services. The Sergeant-at-Arms is also there, to ensure decorum and security in the chamber and to supervise the messengers.

### ***STANDING COMMITTEES***

Committees are not that different from the full body, just smaller and seated at a table. The committee chair sits at the head of the table. To one side of the chair is the committee clerk. This person is a member of the chair's personal staff. The clerk helps the chair plan, organize, and run the hearing, and prepares a committee report afterward.

To the other side of the chair is the Legislative Council staff member assigned to the committee. This person's job is to answer questions from the chair and committee members regarding legal and policy matters, as well as committee procedures. The Legislative Council staff are non-partisan, and assist all members of the committee.

The Republican members of the committee are seated on one side of the hearing table and the Democratic members are on the other. Seated behind each committee member, usually, is a person from that member's personal staff. Like the legislators they work for, they are there to learn about the subject the committee is hearing. In cases when the legislator is absent or

temporarily out of the room, this staff member takes notes and collects written testimony for the legislator.

Seated or standing near the door is a messenger. The messenger collects hearing registration slips from persons wishing to testify and delivers them to the committee clerk, distributes testimony to committee members, runs errands, and performs other services at the request of the committee chair and members.

### ***BEHIND THE SCENES***

Many other people work behind the scenes to make the Legislature function. All members have personal staff who perform many functions for them, including running their Capitol offices, researching ideas for legislation, preparing them for committee meetings and floor sessions, and responding to contacts from constituents. The bulk of the other legislative staff are in five non-partisan agencies:

- The Legislative Reference Bureau (LRB) provides bill drafting, research, and library services.
- The Legislative Fiscal Bureau (LFB) provides fiscal analysis of legislation and staffs the Joint Committee on Finance. The LFB has a particularly important role in the development of the biennial state budget.
- The Legislative Council (LC) works with standing committees and study committees and provides research and other services to the committees and to individual legislators and their staff.
- The Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB) conducts audits of state agency budgets and programs.
- The Legislative Technology Service Bureau (LTSB) develops and supports the computer systems used by the Legislature.

### **OTHER RESOURCES**

There are many resources providing further information regarding the Wisconsin State Legislature. Here are a few:

- For general information about the Legislature and laws relating to the Legislature, see the first several chapters of the Wisconsin Legislator Briefing Book. This book can be found on the Legislative Council's Internet site, at [http://legis.wisconsin.gov/lc/publications\\_index.html](http://legis.wisconsin.gov/lc/publications_index.html).
- For a detailed description of the legislative process in Wisconsin, see *How a Bill Becomes Law*, published by the Assembly Chief Clerk. To find this document, go to the Legislature's Home Page, at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/>, and click the following sequence of buttons: Assembly; Chief Clerk; Student Page; and How a Bill Becomes a Law.

- For detailed descriptions of the Wisconsin budget process and of selected state programs, with particular emphasis on fiscal aspects of the programs, see the LFB Informational Paper Series, available on the LFB's Internet site at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/lfb/publications>.
- For a comprehensive almanac of information regarding state and local government in Wisconsin, see the Wisconsin Blue Book. Hard copies of this nearly 1,000-page book can be obtained from your Representative or Senator. It can also be accessed on the Legislature's Home Page at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/lrb/pubs/bluebook.htm>.

There are three options for viewing legislative sessions online or on television:

- You may go to the Legislature's Home Page at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/> and click on "Senate Session" or "Assembly Session."
- You may go to the WisconsinEye Internet site at <http://www.wiseye.org/> and click on "State Legislature" or "Video Archive."
- You can watch WisconsinEye programming on cable television, on channel 363 of the Time Warner network or channel 995 of the Charter Communications network.



# A Citizen's Guide to Participation in the Wisconsin State Legislature

*Prepared by the Wisconsin Legislative Council Staff, 2015*

## How to Find Legislative Documents and Follow the Legislative Process

The legislative process is complex and, to the outsider, can be something of a mystery. How does the citizen follow that process? How do you know what is happening on a particular topic? How do you follow the progress of a particular bill? How do you know when a public hearing will be held? The Legislature's Internet site has answers to these questions and much more information.

### **GETTING STARTED**

#### ***THE LEGISLATURE'S HOME PAGE***

There is more than one way to find most kinds of information regarding the Legislature. This guide presents some basic research tools and techniques using the Legislature's Home Page. As you use it, you will discover more tools, and develop your preferred research strategies.

The Home Page can be found at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov>. It is shown in the following figure. It will be referred to throughout this guide, though not all features of the Home Page will be described in detail.

In the upper left portion of the Home Page is a photograph of the State Capitol. (You see a different photograph of the Capitol each time you visit the Home Page.) To the right of the photograph are two quick search functions, one titled **Find a Proposal** and one titled **Find Your Legislators**. Above these is a colored box with links to information or documents of current interest in the Legislature, titled **Special Topics**. The rest of the Home Page consists of links to a wide range of information regarding Wisconsin law and legislation and the Wisconsin State Legislature. Take special note of the **Law and Legislation**, **More Searches**, and **Notification Service** tabs at the bottom of the page--we will refer to them frequently.

In the banner at the top of the page is a general search function. This search function appears on most pages of the Legislature's Internet site, and allows you to search the content associated with that page. On the Home Page, the label on this search function says ***Search Everything Here***.

### ***The More Searches and Law and Legislation Pages***

If you click the ***More Searches*** button on the Home Page, you will see the page shown in the following figure. Below the six search boxes shown in the figure are instructions on how to use them.

The screenshot shows the 'Advanced Search' page of the Wisconsin State Legislature. At the top, there is a dark blue banner with the Wisconsin State Capitol dome on the left, the text 'WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE' in the center, and a search bar on the right labeled 'Search everything here' with a 'Search' button. Below the banner is a navigation menu with links for HOME, SENATE, ASSEMBLY, COMMITTEES, SERVICE AGENCIES, DOCS, OPTIONS, and HELP. The main content area is titled 'Advanced Search' and contains six search boxes:

- Find My Legislators**: Includes an 'Address' input field, a 'Find' button, and a 'Use current location' button.
- Find a Committee**: Includes a 'Committee Name' input field and a 'Find' button.
- Find a Proposal**: Includes an input field with the example text ''AB5' or 'mining'' and a 'Find' button.
- Go to Proposal**: Includes radio buttons for 'Assembly' and 'Senate' (the latter is selected), a 'Bill' dropdown menu, an input field for 'Number', a '2013 Regular Session' dropdown menu, and a 'Go' button.
- Go to Act**: Includes an input field for 'Act Number' and a 'Go' button.
- Go to a Statute**: Includes an input field with the example text ''ch. 701' or '13.92'' and a 'Go' button.

The ***More Searches*** page will give you access to most of the information you are likely to need. However, for those wanting to do deeper research, click the ***Law and Legislation*** button at the bottom of the Home Page. The page that you will see is shown in the next figure.

**Statutes**

1. Table of Contents
2. Subject Index to the Statutes
3. Sections Affected by Acts
4. Statute Cross-References
5. Wisconsin Constitution

**Administrative Code**

1. Table of Contents
2. Administrative Register
3. Subject Index to Administrative Code
4. Administrative Code Cross-References
5. Administrative Code Citations
6. Clearinghouse Rules (Active Rules)
7. Final Filed Rule Orders
8. Subject Index to Clearinghouse Rules
9. Emergency Rules

**2013-14 Session**

1. Senators and Representatives
2. Committees
3. Bill, Rule, and Appointment Histories
4. Text of Introduced Proposals
5. Amendment Text
6. Acts
7. Veto Messages
8. Enrolled Bills
9. Drafting Files
10. Votes
11. Assembly and Senate Floor Calendars
12. Schedule of Committee Activities
13. Assembly and Senate Journals
14. Committee Records (ROCPs)
15. Legislative Rules
16. All Session-Related Documents

**Bulletin of Proceedings Indices**

1. Subject Index to Acts
2. Subject Index to Legislation
3. Subject Index to Journals
4. Author Index to Legislation
5. Subject Index to Clearinghouse Rules
6. Miscellaneous Budget Documents

**Miscellaneous Documents**

1. Executive Orders
2. Rulings of the Chair
3. Wisconsin Supreme Court Rules
4. Opinions of the Attorney General
5. Town Law Forms

**Archives**

1. Law
2. Districts
3. Session
4. Drafting Files
5. Admin Code

**Links**

1. Help
2. Feeds
3. Preferences
4. Feedback
5. Notification Service

The **Law and Legislation** page has links to 51 separate sources of information, arranged in three columns. The left-hand column is dedicated to current law--the State Statutes and Constitution and the Administrative Code (the rules promulgated by executive branch agencies to implement the Statutes). The center column relates to the Legislature and legislation. (Much of the information about the Legislature is also available directly from the Home Page.) Among other information, the right-hand column has a group of links under the heading **Archives**; use these links to find information about legislation from prior sessions or the law as it existed in prior years.

## **USING THE HOME PAGE AND DOCUMENTS PAGE**

There are multiple ways to find most any type of information on the Legislature's Internet site. The following describes some of the basic search functions. Explore these search functions and you will find that they are powerful tools to research many types of legislative documents.

### ***HOW DO I USE THE GENERAL SEARCH FUNCTION?***

You can use the general search function located in the upper right of each page to find information on specific topics. If you do your search from the Home Page, you will be

searching all documents located on the Legislature's website, including, for example, reports written by the legislative service agencies, information about the Legislature and legislative committees, and information posted on individual legislators' web pages, as well as the text of bills and amendments. What is more, this function searches materials for the current legislative session and the entire archive. If you do your search from another page, you will be searching only the documents associated with that page.

The general search function shows search results in two columns. The **Website Results** column is documents--reports and the like. The results in this column can be refined using the buttons to the left and the drop-down menu above (where the words "All Sites" appear). The **Legislative Publications** column is material such as bills, amendments, and the statutes. If you click on "**view more results**," at the bottom of that column, you will get a new page showing these results in greater detail. This page also has a column on the right with tools to limit the search.

To find information regarding renewable energy, for example, go to the Home Page, type "renewable energy" in the box, and click "Search." You will get over 100 website results. You can limit these results using the buttons to the left, or by using the box that says "All Sites." For example, click **All Sites** and select "Legislative Council" from this drop-down menu and then click the search button again. You will now see many fewer results, all being documents on the Legislative Council's pages. To view a document, click on the title.

To see the bills and statutes this search found, click on **View more results** at the bottom of the **Legislative Publications** column. This shows more than 2,500 results for the search on "renewable energy." If you click **2013 Biennium**, the results are pared down by about 90%; if you further limit the search to **Text of Legislation**, for example, you find 22 bills and resolutions introduced in the 2013 Legislative Session that include the words "renewable" and "energy."

### ***HOW DO I FIND THE STATUS AND TEXT OF A BILL?***

The **Find a Proposal** search function on the Home Page is an easy-to-use tool to find the text and status of legislation, searching by key words or bill number. Simply fill in the form and click the "Submit" button or hit "Enter" on your keyboard. On the next screen you see, showing search results, click on the number of the bill you are interested in to get information about it. Similar searches for bills, acts, and statutes can be done from the **More Searches** page and from the **Law and Legislation** page.

These tools actually give you far more than just the text of a bill. If the bill was passed and signed by the Governor, you will find the number of the final, published act, as well as a link to a brief memorandum by the Legislative Council describing it (labeled "LC Act Memo"). If the bill was amended, you will get a link to the text of the amendments and the Legislative Council amendment memo. In addition, you will get links to fiscal estimates submitted by state agencies affected by the legislation, the record of committee proceedings, and information about lobbying on the bill, prepared by the Government Accountability Board.

The database these tools use includes information for the current legislative biennium only, including the general session and any special sessions. A special session is identified by the

month and year in which the Governor called the session, such as the October 2013 Special Session. Assembly Bill 2 from that session would be identified as 2013 OC3 Assembly Bill 2. Information regarding earlier legislative biennia is available using links under the **Archives** heading on the **Law and Legislation** page.

Note that bills and laws contain many references to other laws. Following these references is essential to understanding what you are reading. [See the later chapter of this guide, titled *How to Read a Bill*.] In the documents found through this search function, most of the references are live links that will take you to the referenced provisions.

### ***HOW DO I FIND A BILL IF I DON'T KNOW THE BILL NUMBER?***

Use the general search function on the Home Page, described earlier, to find the number of a bill. Use search terms that either describe the subject or that you think are likely to be found in the bill. If you are not able to find the bill number this way, your legislator's office may be able to help you. If you do not know who your legislator is, use the **Find My Legislators** function on the Home Page to find out.

### ***HOW DO I TRACK A BILL THROUGH THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS?***

The Wisconsin State Legislature has a legislative notification service that allows anyone to track the progress of legislation and the activities of the Legislature and legislative committees. A user specifies what topics he or she wants to follow and the service notifies the user by email of developments related to the specified topics.

To activate this service, click on **Notification Service** on the Home Page. You will first need to create an account. Once you have an account, you must specify what you want to track. The service then provides daily email notices of key events affecting legislation you are tracking, such as the scheduling of a bill for a public hearing, an executive session (committee vote), or debate in the full house. The **Help** tab provides instructions in how to use the service.

The service offers four ways to track legislative activities:

- By **subject**. This option allows you to identify legislation by subject, based on key words, which you can then track.
- By **proposal** (bill number). This option allows you to track specific bills. There is a search box, used to designate the bills you are interested in. The bills you have selected are then listed in a second box. This list provides useful information about the bills, including the relating clause (bill subject) and links to the bill text and history.
- By **committee**. This option allows you to track the activity of specific committees. To add a committee to your list, click the down arrow at the end of the **Select Committee** line and select the committee from the drop-down list.
- By **author**. This option is under development. Once available, it will allow users to track all legislation introduced by selected legislators.

### ***WHAT IS AN RSS FEED?***

RSS feeds are another tool that allows you to track some, but not all, legislative activity. They are a particularly good way to track the progress of an individual bill. Look for the RSS symbol ---- on an Internet page displaying the bill text, bill history, or other information about the bill. Click on this symbol and then click on "Subscribe to this feed." Updated information on the subject of the feed you have selected will automatically be downloaded to your computer as it becomes available. To learn more about them, click on ***RSS Feeds*** on the Home Page, under the ***Law and Legislation*** heading.

### ***HOW DO I FIND OUT ABOUT A PUBLIC HEARING ON A BILL?***

The best way to find out about a public hearing on a bill is through the legislative notification service or RSS feeds, described earlier. However, hearings sometimes are scheduled with very little notice. As a backup, you can call the office of the chair of the committee that will hold the hearing and ask for the committee clerk. The clerk may be able to tell you when the chair intends to hold a hearing.

### ***HOW DO I FIND INFORMATION ABOUT THE BUDGET BILL?***

The budget bill is a massive document, many hundred pages in length, affecting all of state government and many other subjects. The best way to find information about it is to use the Internet site of the Legislative Fiscal Bureau (LFB), the agency that assists the Legislature through this process. In the banner at the top of the Home Page, click ***Service Agencies*** and then ***Legislative Fiscal Bureau***. The ***Publications*** tab on the LFB's home page gives a drop-down menu with various choices related to the budget bill and other topics.

### ***HOW DO I FIND CURRENT LAW?***

The easiest way to find a statute if you know the section number is to use the ***Go to a Statute*** search box on the ***More Searches*** page--just type the section number into the search box and click "Go." If you want to do a key-word search, or if you want to search the Administrative Code, the ***Law and Legislation*** page is the place to start. To search the Statutes, click on ***Table of Contents*** under the Statutes heading and enter your key words or a section number in the search box and click "Search." Again using "renewable energy" for our example, you get 41 search results, meaning that the terms are found in 41 chapters of the statutes. This search function presents the search results by chapter, starting with the chapter that uses the term most (unless you specify a different order, at the bottom of the page). In our example, the words "renewable" and "energy" appear together in 56 individual provisions of Chapter 196, *Regulation of Public Utilities*, far more than in any other chapter. This lets you know that Chapter 196 is an important place to look for laws regarding renewable energy and related subjects.

The search results show only the sentence or phrase that contains the search terms. To see the whole statute in context, click on the section number. This will give you the text of the entire chapter, with your search terms highlighted. As with reading bills, be sure to follow cross-references in the text of the statutes, for a complete understanding of what you are reading.

### ***HOW DO I OBSERVE THE LEGISLATURE IN SESSION?***

There are at least three ways you can watch a session of the Legislature. First, on the Home Page, click ***Senate Session*** or ***Assembly Session***. On the left side of the screen that opens, you will find a calendar for the day's session. Along with this calendar are links to many documents related to the bills being considered--the bills themselves and any amendments, fiscal estimates, and reports and analyses relating to the bills. You may click these links to view these documents on the right side of the screen, or you may click a link at the top of the page to watch the session.

A second way to observe a legislative session is on WisconsinEye, a public affairs network that broadcasts all legislative sessions, many legislative committee meetings, and much more relating to state and local government in Wisconsin. You can watch WisconsinEye online at <http://www.wiseye.org/>. In addition, you may view it on channel 163 of the Time-Warner network or channel 995 of the Charter Communications network.

The third, and perhaps best, way to observe the Legislature is to come to the Capitol in Madison and sit in the gallery of the Senate or Assembly to watch the proceeding from close up.

### ***WHAT ELSE CAN I LEARN FROM THE LEGISLATURE'S HOME PAGE?***

The Legislature's Home Page is a source of much more information. By clicking on ***Senators*** or ***Representatives***, you get rosters of the two houses of the Legislature with biographies of the members and links to their individual web pages. Each member's home page typically describes the member's district and presents information of interest to that member's constituents.

Clicking on ***Committees*** gets you lists of the standing committees of the two houses and links to each committee's web page. A committee web page includes a roster of committee members and various information about the committee's work, including upcoming meetings and the status of bills referred to it. For similar information regarding joint committees and Legislative Council study committees, click ***Committees*** in the banner at the top of the Home Page and then click either ***Joint*** or ***Study***.

Other links on the Home Page provide a biennial session calendar, indicating when in a two-year session the Legislature is scheduled for committee work or floor sessions, daily floor calendars, and links to live video broadcasts of the Legislature in session. The ***Eye on Lobbying*** button links to the web site of the Government Accountability Board and provides extensive information about lobbying in both the legislative and executive branches of Wisconsin government.

Click on any of these links to enter the database and then use the search function at the top of the page to search the database, using search terms that describe the subject you are interested in.

## **OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

Five nonpartisan professional agencies support the Legislature, four of which produce a wide range of reports and documents. Their respective home pages can be reached through the **Service Agencies** tab in the banner at the top of the Legislature's Home Page.

- The **Legislative Council** prepares brief descriptions of all amendments adopted and all bills enacted into law, identified as amendment memos and act memos. It prepares a Legislator Briefing Book each session, which provides an overview of a wide range of subjects that come before the Legislature. It also produces informational memoranda on topics of current interest.
- The **Legislative Audit Bureau** (LAB) conducts audits of state agencies and state programs, and publishes its findings and recommendations in audit reports.
- The **Legislative Fiscal Bureau** (LFB), as already noted, prepares extensive materials regarding the state budget. In addition, it produces a series of informational papers every biennium which provide in-depth descriptions of state programs, with a particular emphasis on the fiscal aspect of the programs.
- The **Legislative Reference Bureau** (LRB) produces the Wisconsin Blue Book each biennium. This is a very detailed compendium of information about state and local government in Wisconsin, as well as other topics. (There is a link to an online version of the Blue Book on the Legislature's Home Page.) In addition, the LRB produces several series of publications on a variety of topics. The LRB also maintains a reference library relating to the Legislature at One East Main Street, in Madison.



# A Citizen's Guide to Participation in the Wisconsin State Legislature

*Prepared by the Wisconsin Legislative Council Staff, 2015*

## How to Contact Your Legislator

Have you ever been told by a friend or co-worker, when you were expressing frustration about something, "You ought to call your legislator"? If you have, you are not alone, judging from the volume of contacts legislators receive from their constituents. An informal survey of legislative offices revealed that each office receives anywhere from 1,000 to 5,000 such contacts in a year.

### **REASONS TO CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATOR**

Constituents contact their legislators for various reasons. Here are some of the more common reasons:

- **To register a position on a bill or a specific topic.** One of the most common reasons for contacting your legislator is simply to tell him or her how you feel about something. It may be a bill that the Legislature will be voting on in the near future or a general topic that the Legislature is likely to take up. You may agree or disagree with your legislator's position on the subject. Whatever the case, a brief phone call or short e-mail message is usually all it takes to register your position. Legislative offices record this information, so that the legislator knows how his or her constituents feel.
- **To request or recommend legislation on a specific topic.** Ideas for legislation come from many sources. One of these sources is individuals who contact their legislators--the citizen who decides that "there ought to be a law." Your suggestion for legislation may relate to general public policy, such as reducing taxes or ensuring adequate funding for a particular program, or it may be a very specific recommendation in response to a particular problem that you have encountered.
- **To find out what the law or state policy is on a particular topic.** One of the key elements of a democratic society is an informed public, which includes knowing what the law is and what policies and programs your government is implementing. That is

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<http://www.legis.wisconsin.gov/lc>

more than any one person can know, but your legislator's office can help you find this sort of information.

- **To seek advice or assistance regarding a problem with state government.** Do you think you have been treated unfairly by a state agency? Do you feel like you are being given a bureaucratic run-around? Your legislator's office may be able to help you break that log jam, find the right person for you to talk to, or help you understand what rights you have to appeal a government decision.
- **To seek advice or assistance regarding a problem with other entities.** You may have a problem with an entity outside of state government. For example, you may have a billing problem with your electric utility that you have not been able to resolve or you may feel that you were tricked into buying something by deceptive advertising. Your legislator's office may be able to help you find resources to resolve your problem, such as finding staff at the Public Service Commission to help you deal with that billing problem or staff at the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection to look into deceptive advertising.

### **TOPICS YOUR LEGISLATOR CANNOT HELP WITH**

There are definite limits to what a legislator or the legislator's staff can help you with. Be aware of these limits so that you know what is reasonable to expect when you contact your legislator. The following are topics legislators get asked about regularly:

- **Legal advice.** While your legislator's office can help you find a certain amount of information regarding the law, your legislator cannot give you legal advice. In many cases, individuals need legal representation to address a problem, and your legislator cannot substitute for this.
- **Court issues.** Court issues can only be addressed in the judicial branch of government. Your legislator cannot influence these proceedings, and it would be totally inappropriate for a legislator to try to do so. Again, in these cases, you may need legal representation.
- **Financial advice.** Legislators are not trained financial advisors but, still, some constituents ask them for financial advice. These constituents should see a qualified financial advisor.
- **Federal issues.** Some issues are a matter of federal, rather than state jurisdiction. States have no control over programs administered by the federal government and state legislators have little influence over federal agencies. If you contact your state legislator on one of these issues, he or she is likely to refer you to your representative to Congress.
- **Local issues.** Similarly, local issues are outside the province of state legislators. However, your legislator may be able to put you in touch with someone in local government who can help resolve a problem.

## **HOW DO I CONTACT MY LEGISLATOR?**

The first step in contacting your legislator is knowing who your legislator is. The easiest way to do this is the tool found on the Legislature's home page, at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov>. In the center of that page is a link that says Find My Legislators. Click on that link and fill in the form to get the names of your state representative and senator.

If you do not have computer access, you can call your local town, village, or city clerk's office to find out who represents you in the state Legislature. Your local library may be able to help you with this also.

There are of course several ways that you can contact your legislator:

- **Phone.** You can contact your legislator by phone, in the district, or at his or her Capitol office in Madison. You can find these phone numbers on the members' home pages. To find these, go to the Legislature's Home Page, at <http://legis.wisconsin.gov>, click on "Senators" or "Representatives," and then scroll down to find your legislator.
- **E-mail.** The e-mail addresses of members of the Wisconsin Legislature all have the same format. For members of the Assembly, the form is [Rep.Jones@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Rep.Jones@legis.wisconsin.gov); for members of the Senate, the form is [Sen.Adams@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Sen.Adams@legis.wisconsin.gov).
- **Mail.** You can reach your legislator by mail at one of the following addresses:
  - Representatives whose last names begin with a letter from A to L:
    - P.O. Box 8952, Madison, 53708-8952
  - Representatives whose last names begin with a letter from M to Z:
    - P.O. Box 8953, Madison, 53708-8952
  - All Senators:
    - P.O. Box 7882, Madison, 53707-7882

In addition, many legislators keep "office hours" or conduct listening sessions in their districts. These are specifically designed to give constituents direct access to the legislator. Watch the newspapers for announcements, or call the legislator's Capitol office to ask if the legislator is planning such a session.

## **THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN CONTACTING YOUR LEGISLATOR**

- **Contact your own legislator.** If you have strong feelings about a bill, there is the temptation to contact the author to express your views, even if the author is not your legislator. You are certainly free to do so, but be aware that a legislator will give less weight to the opinion of residents of another legislative district. If you are requesting assistance, it is particularly important to contact your own legislators.

- **Give your name and contact information.** If you are asking for assistance, your legislator will need to know how to contact you. Put this information on the letter you send (if you send a letter), in case the envelope is lost or discarded.
- **Ask for a response.** In particular, ask what your legislator's position is on the topic you are writing or calling about. As a constituent, you are entitled to know.
- **Be specific and clear.** If you are calling in regard to legislation, be sure you know the bill number before you call. If you are calling to recommend legislation, describe the problem that you believe needs to be addressed and, if you have a particular solution in mind, describe that as well. Also, be sure to state your reasons for the positions you want your legislator to take.

If you are calling for advice or assistance, describe the problem well. Give as many details as you can and do not withhold information. Your legislator's staff will need a complete picture of the problem if they are to help you.

- **Be timely.** If you want to influence a vote, you need to get your correspondence to your legislator before the vote is taken.
- **Be personal.** To have the greatest impact, take the time to learn about the issue and then sit down and write a letter in your own words or make a phone call stating your own thoughts. On particularly controversial topics, advocacy groups deluge legislators with hundreds of identical post cards or phone calls. To be sure, legislators count these contacts, but give them much less weight than individually composed communications.

In addition, to the extent possible, base your comments on your own experiences. A personal story has much more impact than a generic statement of position.

- **Be reasonable.** Try not to ask for something your legislator cannot do.
- **Be courteous.** If you are calling because you disagree with your legislator, remember common courtesy. Your first contact most likely will be with your legislator's staff, who is working to help you, even if you disagree with your legislator.



# A Citizen's Guide to Participation in the Wisconsin State Legislature

*Prepared by the Wisconsin Legislative Council Staff, 2015*

## How to Testify at a Public Hearing

A citizen's interaction with the Legislature often takes place in legislative committee meetings. Committees are where much of the Legislature's work gets done. Their primary function is to advise the full body (the Assembly or the Senate) regarding legislation and other matters within their subject areas. In addition to bills, committees review proposed administrative rules and Senate committees make recommendations to the Senate regarding confirmation of appointments made by the Governor. From time to time, committees hold briefings and oversight or informational hearings, in which they learn about programs administered by state agencies and look into problems or controversies that arise in those programs.

Committees hold two kinds of meetings:

- In **public hearings**, committees hear testimony from legislators, agency staff, and members of the public regarding the matters before them. Public hearings are one of the primary means by which legislators learn about these matters.
- In **executive sessions**, committees debate the merits of proposals and take votes. A committee's report consists of its recommendations to the full body regarding what amendments to a proposal should be adopted and whether the proposal should be passed.

All legislative committee meetings are open to the public.<sup>1</sup> The public may participate in public hearings, as described in this chapter, and may attend but may not participate in executive sessions. At informational hearings, testimony is often limited to invited speakers only, usually experts on the subject being examined or agency staff responsible for the program under review in the hearing.

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<sup>1</sup> Many committee meetings may also be watched on WisconsinEye, a service that broadcasts government proceedings on television or at the WisconsinEye Internet site, at <http://www.wiseye.org/>.

## **ABOUT PUBLIC HEARINGS**

### ***PURPOSE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS***

The purpose of a public hearing is to educate and inform a committee of the Legislature regarding bills it is considering. People testify at hearings for various reasons, which usually include one or more of the following:

- To describe the purpose and effect of a bill. This kind of testimony is typically provided by the author of the bill, though it is sometimes given by a representative of a state agency or advocacy group that worked with the author to develop the bill.
- To express support for or opposition to a bill. Most speakers will indicate a position on the bill. However, some will speak “for information only, neither for nor against.”
- To provide information about a bill that the committee or author may not know. This information may include:
  - Further background information and context regarding the bill.
  - An explanation of how the bill affects the speaker or others, individually.
  - An explanation of what might be unintended consequences of the bill.
- To suggest improvements to a bill. Suggestions may be general ideas or may be specific recommendations of how the wording of the bill should be changed.

### ***FORMAT AND PROCESS OF PUBLIC HEARINGS***

When you enter a hearing room, you will see a variety of people, each with their respective role in the hearing process:

- The committee chair sits at the head of the table.
- To one side of the chair is the committee clerk. This person is a member of the chair’s personal staff. The clerk helps the chair plan, organize, and run the hearing, and prepares a committee report afterward.
- To the other side of the chair is the Legislative Council staff member assigned to the committee. This person’s job is to answer questions from the chair and committee members regarding legal and policy matters, as well as committee procedures. The Legislative Council staff are non-partisan, and assist all members of the committee.
- The Republican members of the committee are seated on one side of the hearing table and the Democratic members are on the other.
- Seated behind each committee member, usually, is a person from that member’s personal staff. Like the legislators they work for, they are there to learn about the

subject the committee is hearing. In cases when the legislator is absent or temporarily out of the room, this staff member takes notes and collects written testimony for the legislator.

- Seated or standing near the door is a messenger, or “page.” This person, a member of the Sergeant-at-Arms’ staff, collects hearing registration slips from persons wishing to testify and delivers them to the committee clerk, distributes testimony to committee members, runs errands, and performs other services at the request of the committee chair and members.

The committee chair opens the meeting by striking the gavel and calling the committee to order. After the roll call and any preliminary business, the chair begins calling witnesses to speak on the bills being heard. Each speaker takes a seat at the committee table, delivers his or her testimony, responds to questions from committee members, and then yields the seat when excused by the chair. A witness can be at the hearing table for as little as a minute or two or as long as an hour or two, depending partly on the length of the testimony but mostly on the questions asked by committee members.

Hearings typically follow a pattern something like the following:

- The first speaker is usually the bill’s author, who explains the purpose of the bill and what it does.
- If there are speakers with particular knowledge or expertise relating to the bill being heard, they are typically called after the author. These experts are as likely to be opponents of the bill as supporters. They include individuals such as:
  - The state agency that will have to implement or enforce the bill’s provisions.
  - Lobbyists who helped develop the bill.
  - Other experts.
- The remaining speakers commonly alternate between those in favor of the bill and those opposed to the bill, as called by the chair. Speakers commonly include:
  - Lobbyists, representing businesses, trade associations, and citizen organizations.
  - Local government officials.
  - Small business owners.
  - Private citizens.

The committee chair directs the hearing and maintains order. The chair determines the order of speakers and recognizes committee members who want to ask questions.

There is no typical length for a hearing; some last only a few minutes, while others can last all day and well into the night--just how long depends on how many bills are being heard, how long the testimony is, and how many questions committee members ask.

### **HOW SHOULD I PREPARE TO TESTIFY AT A PUBLIC HEARING?**

Testifying at a public hearing is a form of public speaking. Some preparation ahead of time will make your testimony more effective.

- Familiarize yourself with the bill:
  - Read about the bill, or read summaries of it.
  - Talk to others about it.
  - Read the bill itself.
- Prepare your testimony:
  - Organize your thoughts; think about what you want to say.
  - Put it on paper; typed is nice, but handwritten is fine.
  - Make copies: 20 for an Assembly committee or 10 for a Senate committee should be enough.
- Practice your testimony--to your family or in the mirror.

### **WHAT DO I DO WHEN I GET TO THE PUBLIC HEARING?**

- Fill out a hearing slip:
  - Write your name clearly, so that the chair can read it to call on you.
  - Check the appropriate box, indicating that you are testifying in favor, in opposition, or for information only.
- Give the hearing slip to the messenger, take a seat, and wait to be called.

### **WHAT IF I DON'T WANT TO TESTIFY?**

- You may “register” your position on the bill by checking the box on the hearing slip indicating that you support or oppose the bill but do not want to testify. This will be recorded in the committee report.
- You are also welcome to attend a hearing and simply listen without filling out a hearing slip.

## **WHAT DO I DO WHEN I AM CALLED?**

- Give copies of your testimony to the messenger to distribute to the committee members.
- Take a seat in the witness chair.
- When the chair acknowledges you, thank the chair and present your testimony.
- When you are through, thank the committee and wait to see if committee members have questions for you.

## **IMPORTANT RULES**

- The purpose of a hearing is to educate the committee members. You speak to them and they ask questions of you, but witnesses and members of the audience do not ask questions of the committee or staff.
- Applause, cheering, booing, waving signs, or other expressions of sentiment are not allowed. In addition to maintaining an appropriate level of decorum, this rule is necessary to ensure that everyone, regardless of point of view, has the opportunity to address the committee without intimidation.

## **POINTERS FOR TESTIFYING**

- Do not be intimidated:
  - By the committee. As one Senator put it, “Elected officials are regular people, just a little busier than most. They work in a fancy building, have big titles and power. But--they work for you.”
  - By other people present. You have as much right to testify as anyone else--even if you are “only” a regular citizen, and even if your point of view is greatly outnumbered by other speakers.
- Keep your testimony brief and to the point--not more than five minutes, preferably less. Note that, in long hearings, the chair may limit testimony, often to only three minutes.
- Make your testimony personal; speak from the heart. Tell the committee how the bill would affect you or how you came to be personally concerned about the subject. Discussion of abstract concepts or statistics is fine, but a personal story often is far more compelling.
- Try not to read your testimony to the committee. Instead, look the committee members in the eye and tell them your story--this will engage them and make them listen.
- Do not repeat what other speakers have said, especially in a long hearing when numerous speakers have already said essentially what you plan to say. Instead, state

your general point of view and indicate that you support the views expressed by previous speakers with that point of view, adding any thoughts of your own that may be new or different.

- If the hearing is long and you cannot stay to the end, notify the committee clerk (via the messenger) and request to be called early. Such requests usually are granted to the extent possible.
- Some questions from committee members will be more a statement than a question. You do not need to respond, but may take the opportunity to comment further.
- Be respectful to everyone in the room--the committee members, staff, other speakers, and anyone else present. It is possible to disagree in the strongest terms while remaining courteous.

### **OTHER THINGS TO KNOW**

- You may have to wait a while to testify, because:
  - There may be one or more bills on the agenda ahead of your bill. Note that the chair may not take bills in the order they are listed on the meeting notice.
  - There may be many people ahead of you to testify on your bill.
- There is no recording, transcript, or minutes prepared for a legislative hearing in Wisconsin, so there is no need to “read your testimony into the record.” Written testimony is distributed to all committee members and is posted on the Legislative Council’s Internet site.
- Committee members may come and go during the hearing. This is often because multiple hearings are going on simultaneously. In most cases, the member’s staff is taking notes and collecting written testimony for the member’s use.
- Smile--you may be on television! The WisconsinEye Network broadcasts many legislative hearings live, and records others for later broadcast. Their broadcasts are on the cable TV networks and on the Internet.



# A Citizen's Guide to Participation in the Wisconsin State Legislature

*Prepared by the Wisconsin Legislative Council Staff, 2015*

## Glossary of Common Legislative Terms

Many terms are unique to the Legislature or have legislative meanings that are different from their standard meanings. Below are terms that are commonly used in the Legislature.

**Act:** A bill that has been passed by the Legislature and become law. A bill passed by the Legislature does not become law unless the Governor signs it, the Legislature overrides the Governor's veto of it, or the Governor fails to take action on it within six days of receiving it from the Legislature.

**Amendment:** A suggested change to a bill or other proposal that has been introduced into the legislative process. An amendment may propose the addition, deletion, or substitution of language in a proposal. See also, "Simple amendment" and "Substitute amendment."

**Appropriation:** A legislative authorization for the expenditure of funds.

**Assembly:** One of the two houses of the Wisconsin Legislature. The 99 members elected to the Assembly are referred to as State Representatives.

**Assembly Committee on Rules:** The Assembly Committee on Rules (often referred to as the "Assembly Rules Committee" or "Assembly Rules") sets the calendar for the Assembly.

**Assembly Organization, Committee on:** The Committee on Assembly Organization (or "Assembly Org") performs various functions such as directing the enrolling or engrossing of proposals by the Assembly Chief Clerk; human resources management; addressing grammatical, structural, or other errors in legislative proposals; managing Assembly publications; reviewing legislative citations; and other tasks.

**Author:** The legislator or legislative committee that introduces a bill or resolution. Members of the same house who "sign on" to the proposal are referred to as "co-authors." Members of the other house who sign on are called "co-sponsors."

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**Bicameral:** Having two branches, chambers, or houses. The Wisconsin Legislature is bicameral, consisting of the Senate and the Assembly.

**Biennial:** Lasting for two years. The Wisconsin Legislature uses a biennial session system.

**Blue Book:** Published since 1853, the Blue Book is an “almanac” of Wisconsin state government and includes comprehensive information about the organization and functions of Wisconsin state government and about elected and appointed officials.

**Budget:** A bill first proposed by the Governor and then introduced in the Legislature that outlines the expected state revenues and proposed expenditures for the upcoming fiscal biennium.

**Caucus:** A meeting of members of the same political party in a particular house of the Legislature. A caucus can be closed or open to the public.

**Chief clerk:** The officer elected by a house of the Legislature to perform and direct the clerical and personnel functions of that house.

**Committee clerk:** A member of a committee chair’s staff who performs the clerical duties for a legislative committee.

**Concurrence:** An action in the second house to approve of (concur in) an action of the first house. See also, “Passage.”

**Conference Committee or Committee of Conference:** A committee consisting of members from both houses of the Legislature that can be formed to resolve differences between different versions of the same proposal passed in the Senate and Assembly.

**Confirmation:** Ratification by a house of the Legislature of a nomination for appointment by the Governor. In Wisconsin, most legislative confirmation is conducted by the Senate.

**Engross:** To incorporate all amendments and corrections to the original proposal in the house of origin before consideration by the second house.

**Enroll:** To incorporate all amendments and corrections to a proposal that were passed, adopted, and concurred in by both houses.

**Executive session or “exec”:** A legislative committee meeting during which the committee votes, or takes “executive action,” on a bill or other proposal. The public is generally not allowed to testify at an executive session. The word “Exec” is also used to mean holding a committee vote on a proposal during an executive session.

**Extraordinary session:** The convening of the Legislature to accomplish specific business identified in the action calling the session. Extraordinary sessions can be called by the Assembly and Senate Committees on Organization, by petition, or by joint resolution of the Legislature.

**First reading:** The formal recognition by a legislative body that a bill or other proposal has been introduced.

**Fiscal Estimate:** An estimate of the effect of a bill on the revenues and expenses of state and local governments.

**Floorperiod:** Periods of time identified in the legislative session calendar as available for consideration of proposals by the full Assembly and Senate.

**General fund:** A fund that is not segregated for a particular purpose from which the state makes general expenditures for various programs.

**Germaneness:** The relevance or appropriateness of an amendment to the subject of a bill. Non-germane amendments are not permitted.

**Hearing:** A legislative committee meeting during which the committee gathers information about proposals under consideration by the committee or other topics related to the committee's assigned issue areas. Public testimony is generally accepted at legislative hearings.

**Interim:** A period of time during which the Legislature is not in session.

**Introduction:** The formal offering of a legislative proposal, for consideration by the house in which it is introduced, by a legislator or a legislative committee. Once introduced, a legislative proposal is assigned a number, for example 2011 Senate Bill 1.

**Jefferson's Manual:** A manual of parliamentary procedure authored by Thomas Jefferson.

**JCRAR:** The Joint Committee for Review of Administrative Rules. Prior to promulgation, all proposed administrative rules are referred to JCRAR following standing committee review. Additionally, JCRAR has the authority to temporarily suspend existing administrative rules.

**JFC or Joint Finance Committee:** The Joint Committee on Finance, a joint committee that is charged with review of all state appropriations and revenues and, in particular, the biennial budget recommendations of the Governor.

**Journal:** The official records of legislative proceedings prepared by each house of the Legislature. The preparation of legislative journals is required under the Wisconsin Constitution.

**Law:** There are four types of law:

- The state and federal **Constitutions** organize the structure and principles of government and establish certain fundamental principles of law, such as the individual rights established in the Bill of Rights.
- **Statutes** are the compiled general laws of the state created by legislation. Individual enactments, which have been passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor, are referred to as "session laws."

- **Administrative rules** are regulations, standards, or policies promulgated by executive branch agencies to implement statutes and administer agency programs. Administrative rules are compiled in the Wisconsin Administrative Code.
- **Case law or common law** is the law established by decisions of the courts.

**Leadership:** Officers of the Legislature responsible for its operation and management of each political caucus. Examples of legislative leadership positions include the Senate president, the Senate president *pro tempore*, the Assembly speaker, the Assembly speaker *pro tempore*, the majority and minority leaders of each house, the assistant majority and minority leaders of each house, and the chairperson for each caucus.

**Legislation:** A proposed or enacted law or change to a law.

**Legislative service agencies:** The nonpartisan agencies that provide legal, analytical, and technical support to the Legislature. They are the Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB), Legislative Council Staff (LC), Legislative Fiscal Bureau (LFB), Legislative Reference Bureau (LRB), and Legislative Technology Services Bureau (LTSB).

**Lobby:** To attempt to influence an elected official on an issue. Lobbying is strictly regulated in Wisconsin and lobbying laws are administered by the Government Accountability Board.

**Motion:** A formal request made for a specific action to be taken in legislative committee executive sessions or during floor debate. Appropriate motions are determined by the applicable rules of procedure.

**Nonpartisan:** Not based on, biased towards, influenced by, affiliated with, or supporting the interests or policies of a political party.

**Nonstatutory law or “nonstat”:** A provision in a bill or act that has a temporary application that is not continuing, and therefore is not included in statutory revisions.

**Notice:** A formal notification under the state’s Open Meetings Law of when and where a public meeting will occur and what issues will be addressed, provided in advance of the meeting.

**Open meetings law:** A state law requiring that public meetings generally be open and made accessible to the public and that public notice be provided in advance of meetings.

**Open records law:** A state law requiring that governmental records generally be open and made available upon request.

**Passage:** A motion seeking approval of a legislative proposal that originated in the house considering the motion. See also, “Concurrence.”

**Point of order:** A request that the presiding officer rule on some matter of parliamentary procedure.

**Presiding officer:** The person presiding over the Senate or Assembly in a legislative session.

**Privileged motions:** Motions and requests related to the meetings, organization, rules, rights, and duties of the Senate or Assembly and its members. Privileged motions or requests take precedence over other questions before the body.

**Proposal:** A bill, amendment, or resolution before a legislative house awaiting action.

**Public hearing:** See “Hearing.”

**Quorum:** The minimum number of members of a committee or legislative body that must be present for business to be conducted.

**Recess:** A time when a legislative body is not in session.

**Recommendation:** The result of a legislative committee vote on a proposal, for instance, recommending passage of or concurrence in a bill.

**Reconsideration:** A motion to revisit an action of a committee or legislative body.

**Referral:** Assignment of a proposal to a legislative committee for its review.

**Rejection:** A motion seeking disapproval of an amendment to a proposal.

**Relating clause:** The part of a proposal that identifies the general subject matter of the proposal.

**Resolution:** A formal statement of opinion or intention passed by a legislative body. Resolutions in the Wisconsin Legislature can be proposed to both houses through a joint resolution. Proposals to amend the Constitution, to create, amend, or repeal a legislative rule, and to set the Legislature’s session calendar are also made by resolution.

**Second reading:** The stage of consideration of a proposal during a floor session during which amendments to the proposal may be considered.

**Senate:** One of the two houses of the Wisconsin Legislature. The 33 members elected to the Senate are referred to as State Senators.

**Senate Organization, Committee on:** The Committee on Senate Organization, or “Senate Org,” has broad authority over the operations of the Senate and sets the calendar for the Senate.

**Sergeant-at-Arms:** The officer elected by the members of one house of the Legislature to perform and direct the police and custodial functions of that house.

**Simple amendment:** An amendment that makes changes in the underlying proposal if adopted. See also, “Amendment” and “Substitute amendment.”

**Sine die adjournment:** The final adjournment of a legislative session.

**Slash number:** The number signifying the version of a document drafted by the LRB. The “slash number” of a draft is the number following the “/” (slash) in the LRB number on the proposal, with the highest numbered version being the newest version.

**Special order of business:** A proposal ordered by the Senate or Assembly to be given consideration at a specified time and taking precedence over the regular orders of business at that time.

**Special session:** A session of the Legislature convened by the Governor to accomplish a special purpose.

**Study committee or special committee:** A committee appointed by the Joint Legislative Council to examine major issues and problems identified by the Legislature. Study committees are made up of legislators and citizens who are interested in or knowledgeable about the study topic and usually do most of their work when the Legislature is in recess.

**Substitute amendment or “sub”:** An amendment that replaces the underlying proposal if adopted. See also, “Amendment” and “Simple amendment.”

**Suspension of the rules:** A motion to take a temporary action otherwise prohibited by rule that requires the support of two-thirds of the members present.

**Table:** A motion to temporarily set aside a proposal and move to other business.

**Third reading:** The stage of consideration of a proposal during a floor session during which bills and other proposals come up for final discussion and possible passage. No amendments may be considered at this point.

**Twenty-four hour rule:** A rule sometimes imposed by legislative committee chairs requiring that any amendments to be considered in executive session must be distributed to the committee members at least 24 hours prior to the executive session.

**Unanimous consent:** A motion asking for unanimous approval of a question without a roll call vote. If an objection is not heard, it is assumed that the request has the consent of all members present.

**Veto:** The action by which all or a part of a bill is rejected by the Governor.

**Veto override:** A vote of both houses of the Legislature to overturn a gubernatorial veto. To be successful, such a vote must receive a two-thirds vote in both houses.

**Voice vote:** A vote taken by asking members in favor to say “aye” simultaneously and then asking those opposed to say “no” or “nay” simultaneously, with the presiding officer deciding which side prevails.