
Wisconsin Legislative Council

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Checklist for Authoring a Bill

Ideas for Legislation

Ideas for new legislation will come from many sources:

- Personal interests.
- Constituents.
- Party or caucus.
- Current events, news items, and briefings.
- Advocates, advocacy organizations, and associations.
- State agency liaisons.
- Local government.
- Task forces and Legislative Council (LC) study committees.
- National organizations.

Obtain More Information, Identify, and Contact Interested Parties

After identifying an issue to address in legislation, you will want to become knowledgeable on the matter. The following resources may be helpful:

- Person who proposed the idea or alerted you to the problem.
- Affected and interested parties.
- Technical experts in government, business, or academia.
- State agencies.
- LC or other service agencies.

Develop Legislative Solution

Once you have information on the problem or issue, develop a strategy to best address the problem legislatively with assistance from:

- Personal staff.
- Legislative service agencies -- LC, Legislative Fiscal Bureau (LFB), Legislative Reference Bureau (LRB), Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB).

Get Your Bill Drafted

Bill drafting includes the following steps:

- *Drafting Instructions.* Clearly communicate your intent and describe in as much detail as possible what you would like the LRB drafter to include in the bill language. LC staff is available to help with drafting instructions.

- *Draft and Drafting File.* The LRB drafter will prepare the bill and create a drafting file with all background information you submit.
- *Fiscal Estimate.* If the bill has a state or local fiscal impact, it will likely be required to have a fiscal estimate prepared by a state agency which approximates the future costs of the bill.
- *Review/Revise Draft.* Once a draft is prepared, review the language to ensure it addresses the issue **exactly** as you desire. The drafter may have questions about parts of the draft. LC staff is available to help respond to these questions. Request a revised draft if any modifications are needed.
- *Jacket Bill.* When you are ready to finalize the bill draft, the LRB will give you “the jacket” which is an envelope that includes copies of the bill draft. This is the official record of the bill.

Introduce the Bill and Seek Co-Sponsors

- *Co-Sponsors.* You may invite legislators from both houses to be co-sponsors.
- *Submit to Chief Clerk.* Submit the jacket to the Chief Clerk’s office. The Chief Clerk will assign the bill a number and notify the president of the Senate or the speaker of the Assembly.
- *Referral to Committee/First Reading.* The president or speaker will refer the bill to a standing committee.

Move Your Bill Through the Legislature

- *Committee Hearing.* Ask the committee chairperson to schedule a hearing on your bill. Prepare your testimony; arrange for others to testify. Testify on the bill.
- *Executive Session.* After the hearing, follow up on concerns raised at the hearing, if you wish, and prepare amendments, if necessary. LC staff is available to assist with this. Ask the committee chairperson to schedule an executive session (“exec”) on the bill.
- *Caucus.* You may be asked to explain the bill in caucus if it is reported out of committee and scheduled for floor action.
- *Floor.* You may be called upon to defend your bill on the floor and explain any amendments to fellow legislators. If the bill passes in your house, follow its progress through the other house.