



Wisconsin Court System

Judicial Ride-Along Program

The Program

Since 1993, the Director of State Courts office has operated a Judicial Ride-Along Program, a program designed to give legislators a better understanding of the court system and to improve two-way communication between legislators and members of the judiciary.

The program invites legislators to spend a half day on the bench with a circuit court judge from their districts. In the past, as many as 70 percent of legislators have participated in the program.

Newly elected legislators are regularly invited to participate, and veteran lawmakers participate as their schedules permit. The program has also been expanded to county board supervisors and members of the media.

“Rides” offer legislators the opportunity to see laws in action and how they impact the lives of citizens in their communities. They can ask questions about procedures and decisions that must be made. If a criminal sentencing is involved, they can learn about the tools judges use to arrive at the best possible sentencing decision. In addition, “rides” offer a first-hand look at the important roles played by court support staff and at how technology (through CCAP, the Consolidated Court Automation Programs) functions to enable the courts to operate in an efficient manner.

Every effort is made to match the legislator with a judge whom he or she knows or with a judge handling an area of law the legislator is particularly interested in.

In 2003, to honor the successful first decade of this unique inter-branch communication effort, circuit court judges invited legislators from both parties and both houses to join them for the annual state prison tour in April. The tours were conducted at 37 prisons, juvenile treatment facilities, boot camps, and other correctional institutions across the state.

How to Arrange a Ride-Along

If you are interested in arranging a judicial ride-along or would like more information about the program, please contact Nancy Rottier.

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