
Wisconsin Legislative Council

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Director



STANDING COMMITTEE PROCEDURE AND PRACTICE

Committee Purpose

- **Vet legislation** within the committee’s subject matter expertise.
- Make **recommendations** to the full body regarding bills and amendments.
- Request and **evaluate information** from state agencies and **identify issues** for legislative review.

Committee Tasks

- **Hear testimony** on bills during a “Public Hearing.”
- **Amend** bills to address policy or technical concerns during an “Executive Session.”
- Vote to **recommend** passage of bills, sometimes as amended.
- Review **administrative rules**.
- Hear testimony and making recommendations on **executive appointments** (Senate).
- Conduct **investigations** within the committee’s subject matter purview, as instructed.

Roles of Different Committee Players

- **Committee members** ask questions of LC staff and those testifying about the legal and policy effects of legislation, offer amendments, serve as a bill resource for other caucus members, and vote on amendments and bills.
- **Committee chairs** have broad authority to direct activities of the committee and dictate the content and conduct of hearings, including: deciding when to hold hearings, what bills to cover, the order and time limits for testimony, and whether to entertain motions on amending and passing bills.
- **Ranking minority members** are typically responsible for strategizing with fellow committee members and reporting on bills in caucus.
- **Committee clerks** function as record-keepers for the committee and handle scheduling, notices, communicating with members, taking the roll and recording motions and votes of members, managing slips for public testimony, and records of committee proceedings.
- **LC staff** serve all members of a committee by answering questions during hearings, summarizing bills and amendments, providing confidential information to individual members, and writing amendment memos explaining how an adopted amendment changes the effect of a bill.

Noteworthy Procedures and Customs

- A **quorum** (majority) of the committee is necessary to begin an executive session, but legislative custom permits a committee to begin a public hearing without a quorum.
- Many committee chairs adopt a “**24-hour rule**,” to require amendments to be available to committee members at least 24 hours prior to an executive session.
- Certain **motions** (e.g., germaneness) can be made on the Senate/Assembly floor, but not in committee.
- **Committee participation rules** differ for the Assembly and Senate. Senators are allowed to attend hearings by phone and vote by mail ballot, while Representatives generally must attend and vote in person.
- Speakers testifying at a public hearing typically submit **written remarks**, which are posted as LC bill hearing materials on the Bill History page.

Practical Tips

- Personal staff may provide materials such as bill folders, prepared questions, and vote statements to help committee members **prepare** for hearings and executive sessions.
- Consider contacting the bill author about any planned amendments. Any amendments approved by the author are customarily deemed “**friendly amendments**.”
- Legislators or staff may obtain advance **feedback from constituents** on bills prior to the hearing.
- Legislators or staff may **consult with LC staff** to better understand legislation or pose anticipated questions prior to a hearing.
- **WisconsinEye** provides live coverage from gavel-to-gavel and mics will pick up conversations that others physically in the room could not overhear.