# LEGISLATIVE FISCAL BUREAU

*State of Wisconsin*

## Duties, Functions, and Organization

# Legislative Fiscal Bureau

## Introduction

The Legislative Fiscal Bureau is a nonpartisan service agency of the Wisconsin Legislature, responsible for providing policy, program and fiscal analyses to the Legislature, legislative leaders, the Joint Committee on Finance, and individual legislators. As staff to the Finance Committee, a 16-member committee comprised of legislators from both houses and parties, the Bureau provides in-depth review and analyses of the state's biennial budget and other bills affecting revenues and appropriations. Duties of the Bureau include revenue estimating; analyses of tax policies, state aid distribution formulas, and state agency budgets; construction of statutory language of legislative budget bills and amendments; presentations before the Joint Committee on Finance, other legislative committees and caucuses; preparation of reports; and responding to legislative inquiries.

## Duties and Functions

The Wisconsin Statutes provide that the Legislative Fiscal Bureau shall: (1) be strictly nonpartisan; (2) provide the Legislature with such fiscal information as will assist the Legislature or legislative committees; (3) recommend alternatives to the Legislature concerning: (a) the state budget, and (b) the revenues and expenditures of the state; (4) provide fiscal and program analyses; (5) review existing and proposed programs and budgets; (6) evaluate requests for appropriations and make recommendations to the Joint Committee on Finance and the Legislature; and (7) at the direction of the Legislature or on the Bureau's own initiative, conduct other studies and perform other duties to the Legislature in dealing with the fiscal affairs of the state.

The Joint Committee on Legislative Organization is charged with setting overall policy for the Bureau. It has established certain specified functions which the Bureau is to perform. These functions are: (1) analyzing agency operating budget requests; (2) serving as the principal committee staff for the Joint Committee on Finance; (3) answering fiscal information requests from individual legislators; (4) evaluating legislative proposals for fiscal effects; (5) analyzing and evaluating state programs; (6) monitoring state agencies' budgets and programs; (7) analyzing agency capital budget requests; (8) estimating state revenues; (9) serving as fiscal staff to other legislative committees; and (10) providing fiscal information services for other legislative staff. A description of these functions follows.

***Analysis of Agency Budget Requests.*** Types of information provided include summaries of agency budget requests, highlights of major areas of requested changes, summaries of proposed new programs, and presentation of alternatives to be used in legislative consideration of the budget bill.

To provide such information, the Bureau has a staff of fiscal analysts who are familiar with agency programs and can evaluate budget requests in detail. Familiarity with an agency's programs requires knowledge of the past accomplishments or shortcomings as well as the program's current operation. Analysts also present data and program information, which will aid legislators in reaching decisions on appropriation requests.

Although an analyst's work is most intense during the early months of each legislative session, the ongoing need for information on agency programs requires a staff of professional analysts who can study and evaluate the funding and operation of governmental programs.

***Staff Services to the Joint Committee on Finance.*** As the service agency for fiscal matters, the Fiscal Bureau serves as the staff for the Joint Committee on Finance. This joint standing committee is composed of eight members from each house of the Legislature. It is unique among

state legislatures in that the Committee meets jointly for all actions and addresses all bills related to appropriations, revenues, and taxation. In addition, the Committee is responsible for approval of positions outside of the budget and meets periodically for consideration of miscellaneous supplemental appropriations.

A primary responsibility of the Committee is to address the state's biennial budget. The biennial budget is typically introduced, at the request of the Governor, in February of each odd-numbered year, and, by law, is referred to the Joint Committee on Finance.

The Fiscal Bureau produces a comprehensive summary of each item contained in the budget recommended by the Governor. Following publication of that document, the Finance Committee holds public hearings around the state on the budget bill. Once the hearings are concluded, the Committee meets in executive session for a number of weeks and votes on all items of the budget. During the executive sessions, the Fiscal Bureau prepares issue papers on various aspects of the budget, which serve as the basis for Committee deliberations.

Once the Committee has concluded its budget deliberations (typically in June/July of each odd-numbered year), the Fiscal Bureau works with attorneys at the Legislative Reference Bureau to incorporate all of the Committee's decisions in bill form for consideration by the two houses of the Legislature.

***Fiscal Information Requests from Individual Legislators.*** In addition to requests for information relating to the state budget, there are often requests for information about other fiscal matters. Much of this information is readily obtainable, but some requests require hours (and sometimes days) of work by an analyst. If the information is not readily available, the fiscal analyst identifies the source from which it can be obtained and assists in gathering the information.

***Evaluation of Legislative Proposals for Fiscal Effect.*** Legislators often express a need for an independent analysis of the estimated costs of proposed legislation. Upon request of the author of a bill, the Fiscal Bureau will review the official fiscal estimate, prepared by the agency affected by a bill, and provide an independent estimate of the fiscal effect of the proposal. In addition, the analyst may be able to identify alternatives that could modify the fiscal impact of a bill or suggest changes in wording that will eliminate ambiguous or inconsistent provisions. Further, at the direction of the Joint Committee on Finance, the Bureau will prepare a supplemental fiscal estimate for any proposed amendment or substitute amendment which would substantially modify the fiscal estimate for the original bill.

***Continuing Review of Agency Programs and Expenditures.*** By statute, the formal execution of a budget rests with the individual state agencies and the Department of Administration. The Legislature, however, maintains a continuing interest in agency programs and in how program funds have been expended. The Fiscal Bureau, as a part of its ongoing monitoring of state agencies' operations, is expected to monitor state agencies' budget execution. This is necessary for several reasons: (1) an agency's expenditure of appropriated funds in one biennium has a relationship to that agency's budget request in the next biennium; (2) changes in budget intent by an agency need to be communicated to the Legislature prior to the next budget session; and (3) full understanding of an agency's program operations requires knowledge of how an agency actually expended its budgeted funds.

***Program Analysis and Evaluation.*** During budget deliberations, there are often statements to the effect that particular programs or activities never achieved, or are no longer achieving, the ends for which they were designed, but usually there is little or no data offered to support these statements. For the Fiscal Bureau, program evaluation is viewed as an integral part of the budget process and something to be included in the analysis of agency budget requests.

***State Revenues.*** An activity which requires careful monitoring, and is of equal importance to

budget analysis, is that of estimating state revenues. While this function is an ongoing activity of the Bureau, official estimates are prepared annually. The Bureau prepares revenue estimates each January and will revise those estimates if economic forecasts change.

In addition, in every legislative session, there are proposals for alterations in the state tax system: to collect more revenues, less revenues, or to collect revenues in a different way. Any revenue proposal must also be considered by the Finance Committee which necessitate analysis of the proposal by Bureau analysts.

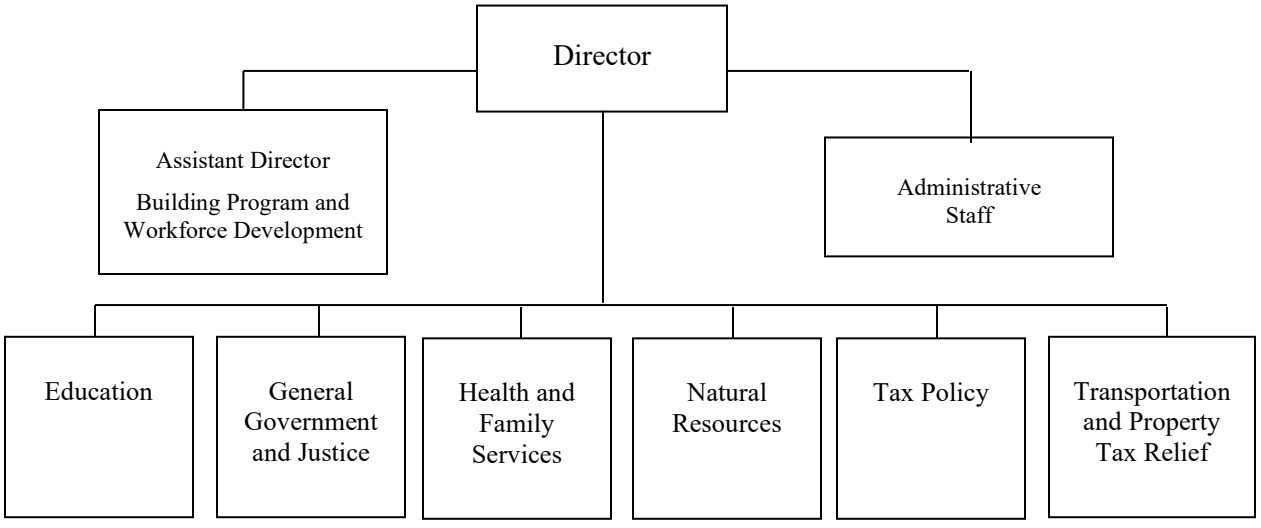
***Services to Other Legislative Committees and Legislative Staff.*** In addition to providing fiscal staff services to individual legislators and the Joint Committee on Finance, the Bureau is occasionally called on to provide services to other legislative committees. Committees may request Fiscal Bureau staff to provide a variety of program and fiscal information. They may also request briefings and other assistance from the Bureau on the Governor's budget proposal as it affects their particular substantive areas.

The Bureau also receives requests for assistance from legislative assistants, staff for committees, and other legislative service agencies for help with fiscal information. The services provided vary from advising staff persons as to the appropriate contact person in an administrative agency to providing detailed fiscal and program analyses.

## Organization

The Bureau is structured into broad, functional area teams composed of several fiscal analysts and headed by a program supervisor (team leader). The following chart illustrates the current organizational arrangement of the Bureau.

**Organizational Chart**



## Publications

The Bureau produces numerous studies, reports, revenue estimates, informational papers, and budget papers and summaries. These documents, and others, can be found at: https://legis.wisconsin.gov/lfb/.

## Staff

The Fiscal Bureau is authorized 35 full-time equivalent positions. The Director of the Bureau is appointed by, and serves at the pleasure of, the Joint Committee on Legislative Organization (JCLO). JCLO is a 10-member legislative committee, which is comprised of: (1) the Speaker of the Assembly and President of the Senate, who serve as the Committee's Co-Chairs; (2) the majority and minority leaders of each house; and (3) the assistant majority and minority leaders of each house.

All members of the Bureau are in the unclassified state service. Appointments are made by the Director on a nonpartisan basis. Staff personnel are hired on a permanent basis and receive the employee benefits available to other state employees.

Staff of the Bureau come from a variety of academic backgrounds and institutions. Each member of the staff has a baccalaureate degree and a number have graduate degrees in such fields as public affairs, economics, political science, and law. A list of colleges and universities that have awarded degrees to members of the Bureau's current staff is shown below.

Beloit College
Creighton University
Georgetown University
Goshen College
Illinois Wesleyan University
Kalamazoo College
Marian University
Northwestern University
Oregon State University
Southwestern University
University of Illinois
University of Minnesota
University of Texas
University of Utah
University of Wisconsin - LaCrosse
University of Wisconsin - Madison
University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee
University of Wisconsin - Platteville
University of Wisconsin - Whitewater
Wheaton College
Yale University

## Employment

Individuals interested in employment with the Bureau may submit a complete resumé, letter describing how your training and experience correspond to the work of the Bureau, and college transcripts to the following address.

Legislative Fiscal Bureau
One East Main Street, Suite 301
Madison, Wisconsin 53703

Or, materials may be emailed to the Bureau at fiscal.bureau@legis.wisconsin.gov.