



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

Prepared by the Wisconsin Legislative Council Staff, 2019

How to Find Legislative Documents and Follow the Legislative Process

The Legislature's [home page](#) is comprehensive and allows you to find out who your legislator is, what committees he or she serves on, and what legislation he or she has authored. You can also visit your legislator's personal website via the home page. Through the home page, you can research current law and pending legislation using over 60 sources of information. You can also view the Legislature's and committees' calendars.

USING THE HOME PAGE AND DOCUMENTS PAGE

There are multiple ways to find information on the Legislature's Internet site. The following describes some of the basic search functions.

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. This function searches materials for the current legislative session and archived materials. If you do your search from another page, you will be searching only the documents associated with that page.

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PRESIDENT**



Roger Roth
(R - Appleton)

**MAJORITY
LEADER**



Scott L. Fitzgerald
(R - Juneau)

**MINORITY
LEADER**



Jennifer Shilling
(D - La Crosse)

WISCONSIN ASSEMBLY



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**ASSEMBLY
SPEAKER**



Robin Vos
(R - Rochester)

**MAJORITY
LEADER**



Jim Steineke
(R - Kaukauna)

**MINORITY
LEADER**



Gordon Hintz
(D - Oshkosh)

LAW AND LEGISLATION

Find a proposal, e.g. 'ABS' or 'mining'



[Find Proposal](#)

- [Current Session](#)
- [Statutes](#)
- [Advanced Search](#)
- [RSS Feeds](#)

ADMINISTRATIVE RULES

Find a rule, e.g. 'CR14-031' or 'natural resources'



[Find Rule](#)

- [Register](#)
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SESSION INFORMATION

- [2019-20 Session Calendar](#)
- [Session Statistics — Updated October 16, 2019](#)
- [Senate Session](#)
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- [Assembly Seating Chart](#)
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- [Wisconsin Eye](#)
- [Eye on Lobbying](#)

MORE INFORMATION

- [NOTICE: Proposed constitutional amendment relating to the rights of crime victims](#)
- [Wisconsin Blue Book](#)
- [Citizen's Guide to the Legislature](#)
- [Report Fraud, Waste and Mismanagement](#)
- [Earmark Transparency Report](#)
- [How a Bill Becomes Law](#)
- [Maps and Geographic Data](#)
- [Press Credentials](#)

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

The **Find Proposal** search function in the **Law and Legislation** box in the middle of the home page is an easy-to-use tool to find the text and status of legislation, searching by key words or bill number. 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 **Advanced Search** page.

These tools 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 Wisconsin Ethics Commission.

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 March 2018 Special Session. Assembly Bill 2 from that session would be identified as 2018 MR8 Assembly Bill 2.

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 the Notify 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. Notify 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 notification service help link at the bottom of the page provides instructions in how to use Notify.

Notify service offers five 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. 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.
- By **author**. This option allows you to track all legislation introduced by selected legislators.

- By **administrative rule**. This option allows you to track activity specific to modifications of the Administrative Code (rules). You may choose to receive notifications ranging from all activity associated with the Administrative Code down to activity regarding one state agency's specific rule chapter.

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, 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. All scheduled hearings appear on the **Committee Schedule**, which may be accessed from the home page.

HOW DO I FIND INFORMATION ABOUT THE BUDGET BILL?

The best way to find information about the budget bill is to use the site for 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?

There are many ways to search for current law. The easiest way to search the State Statutes, either by key word or section number, is to click on the "Statutes" link in the **Law and Legislation** box in the middle of the home page, enter your key words or section number in the search box at the top of the page, and click "Search." If you know the section number, click on the **Advanced Search** link, type the section number into the **Go to a Statute** search box.

Additionally, you may search the statutes by individual chapter on the **Advanced Search** page. Using "renewable energy" as an example, type this phrase in quotations in the search box at the top of the page. Then limit this search by clicking the "Statutes" link in the gray box on the right. You will get over 280 search results, organized by chapter. For example, in Chapter 196, Regulation of Public Utilities, there are 37 instances of the term "renewable energy," 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.

To search the Administrative Code, click on "Administrative Code" in the **Administrative Rules** box in the middle of the home page, enter your key words or section number in the Search box.

The search results show only the sentence or phrase that contains the search terms. To see the whole statute or rule in context, click on the section number. This will give you the text of the entire chapter, with your search terms highlighted.

HOW DO I OBSERVE THE LEGISLATURE IN SESSION?

There are at least three ways you can watch a session of the Legislature. First, in the bottom left box on the home page titled **Session Information**, 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 or through your cable subscription.

The third way to observe the Legislature is to attend a floor session at the Capitol in Madison and sit in the gallery of the Senate or Assembly to watch the proceeding.

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

The Legislature's home page is a source of much more information. For example, to get rosters of the two houses of the Legislature with biographies of the members and links to their individual web pages, click either **Senate** or **Assembly** on the menu bar at the top of the page, then click on **Senators** or **Representatives**, respectively. Each member's home page typically describes the member's district and presents information of interest to that member's constituents.

Clicking on **Committees** on the top menu bar 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 menu bar 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** link at the bottom on the home page links to the web site of the Wisconsin Ethics Commission and provides extensive information about lobbying in both the legislative and executive branches of Wisconsin government.