

LEGISLATIVE

PROCESSES



FEDERAL LEGISLATURE

Forms of Congressional Action

The work of Congress is initiated by the introduction of a proposal in one of four principal forms: the **bill**, the **joint resolution**, the **concurrent resolution**, and the **simple resolution**.

Bills

A bill is the **form used for most legislation**, whether permanent or temporary, general or special, public or private. A bill originating in the House of Representatives is designated by the letters "H.R.", signifying "House of Representatives", followed by a number that it retains throughout all its stages. Bills are presented to the President for action when approved in identical form by both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Introduction & Referral

- Any member in the House of Representatives may introduce a bill at any time while the House is in session. The bill is assigned its legislative number by the Clerk and referred to the appropriate committee by the Speaker.
- An important phase of the legislative process is the action taken by committees. It is during committee action that the most intense consideration is given to the proposed measures; this is also the time when the people are given the opportunity to be heard. Each piece of legislation is referred to the committee that has jurisdiction over the area affected by the measure.

FEDERAL LEGISLATURE

In Committee

- Usually the first step in this process is a public hearing, where the committee members hear witnesses representing various viewpoints on the measure. Each committee makes public the date, place and subject of any hearing it conducts.
- After hearings are completed, members of the committee study the viewpoints presented in detail.
- A vote of committee or subcommittee members is taken to determine what action to take on the measure. If the committee votes to report a bill, the Committee Report is written. This report describes the purpose and scope of the measure and the reasons for recommended approval.

House Floor

Debate time for a measure is normally divided between proponents and opponents. Each side yields time to those members who wish to speak on the bill. After all debate is concluded and amendments decided upon, the House is ready to vote on final passage.

Senate Action

- After a measure passes in the House, it goes to the Senate for consideration. A bill must pass both bodies in the same form before it can be presented to the President for signature into law.
- If the Senate changes the language of the measure, it must return to the House for concurrence or additional changes. This back-and-forth negotiation may occur on the House floor, with the House accepting or rejecting Senate amendments or complete Senate text.

Consideration by the President

After a measure has been passed in identical form by both the House and Senate, it is considered “enrolled.” It is sent to the President who may sign the measure into law, veto it and return it to Congress, let it become law without signature, or at the end of a session, pocket-veto it.

LEVELS OF STATE LEGISLATURES

Structure & Functions

- The Wisconsin Legislature is **bicameral**, meaning that it has two houses, with the power to create, amend, and repeal laws. The two houses are the **Wisconsin State Assembly** and the **Wisconsin State Senate**.
- Wisconsin is divided into **33 Senate districts**, with roughly equal populations, and each Senate district is divided into three Assembly districts. Thus, the **Senate consists of 33 senators and the Assembly consists of 99 representatives**.
- The Legislature operates on a two-year schedule called a **biennial session** that begins in the first week of each odd-numbered year (2023).
- A “floor session” is a meeting of one house of the Legislature, on a particular day. A “floor period” is a period of one or more consecutive weeks when the Legislature is scheduled to hold a floor session.

Activities of Legislature

- Each house creates its own **standing committees** at the beginning of the biennial session, each with a focus on a particular topic (housing); Senate committees generally combine several topic areas.
- These committees have three principal functions related to legislation:
 - To **determine what legislation** will advance through the legislative process. This is a power exercised largely by the committee chair, who decides what bills to schedule for committee consideration.
 - To **present information to committee members** about the bills. **Committee members become the experts** in the Legislature on the bills that come before their committees.
 - To **prepare bills for consideration by the full house**.
- Standing committees hold two kinds of meetings: public hearings and executive sessions. At a public hearing, committee members learn about bills in the committee through testimony presented by the author, experts, lobbyists, and members of the public who have an interest in the bills. Standing committee meetings are generally required to be open to the public, and anyone can testify at public hearings on legislation.
- Bills that have been passed by a standing committee or by the other house may be scheduled for debate and a vote during a floor session.

WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE

Drafting an Idea

When a legislator gets an idea or is prompted by their constituency to make a change, they have a drafting lawyer prepare a draft of a bill to see what laws will need to change.

Introduction

Once it's ready, a new bill is **read before the Assembly or Senate**; this is called an 'introduction', or its 'first reading'. Often, bills are referred to by number at this point: for instance, **2013 Assembly Bill 20**, or '**AB20**'. If they support a bill, legislators from the same house can sign on as co-authors, while members of the opposite house sign on as co-sponsors.

In Committee

- The legislature usually **sends a bill to a relevant committee**. For instance, a bill about schools would probably be referred to the Assembly or Senate Committee on Education. This specialization helps the legislature to give each bill the attention it needs.
- While a bill is 'in committee', legislative service agencies research the bill to determine its impact: for instance, the Legislative Council might find that a bill contradicts federal law, or that scientific studies have found similar measures to be ineffective.
- **Committees also generally hold public hearings**, where they hear from experts and from the general public.
- All bills which involve spending state money or raising taxes are also sent to the Joint Committee on Finance, which is attended both by representatives and senators. They specifically discuss the cost and financial impact of the bill.
- In response to research and hearings, **a committee may offer amendments to a bill**. Then, it **sends its analysis back to the legislature, usually with a recommendation: Should the legislature pass this bill?**

STRUCTURES OF LOCAL LEGISLATURE

County and Municipal Government

- **General purpose** local units of government are divided into two tiers: **counties** and **municipalities (towns, villages, and cities)**. They are all creatures of the state in that their existence depends on laws enacted by the state Legislature. Municipalities and counties also often work together through intergovernmental cooperation agreements to provide local services to their residents.
- General purpose local units of government are distinct from **special purpose** local government units such as **school districts, sanitary districts, and inland lake districts**.

Counties

A county's **legislative power is exercised by the county board of supervisors**, generally through the enactment of ordinances and the adoption of resolutions. In most counties, the **county board carries out executive functions** as well. County board supervisors are elected to two-year terms in the spring nonpartisan election held in odd-numbered years. Each county board consists of supervisors elected from individual supervisory districts drawn by the county board after each federal decennial census.

Municipalities

- **Cities:** The vast majority of Wisconsin cities use the **mayor-council** form of government organization, where the mayor is elected. With this form of government, the **common council (legislative branch)** consists of **alderpersons typically elected by alder districts and the mayor**.
- **Villages:** The **president-village board structure** and the **village board-manager structure** are the most common. While each governmental structure has an **elected legislative body**, the executive may either be elected or appointed by the legislative branch.

PROCESSES OF WISCONSIN LEGISLATURES

General Purpose

Wisconsin is comprised of **72 counties, 1,253 towns, 190 cities, and 411 villages**, commonly referred to as general purpose units of local government.

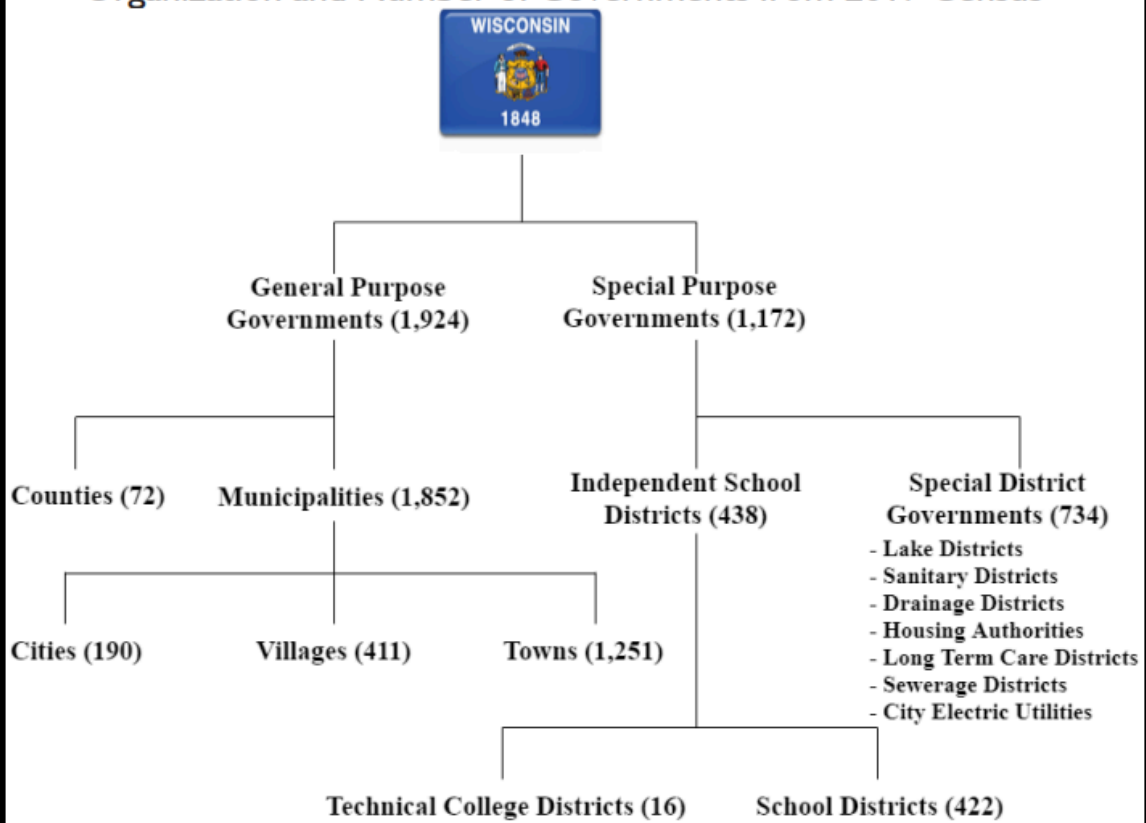
County

The local functions exercised by counties vary widely, but generally include the powers to levy and collect property taxes, construct and maintain county highways, engage in land use planning, and maintain parks and recreational facilities.

Municipal

- Cities and villages incorporate according to general incorporation laws, and the basic outline of city and village government is set forth in the statutes (sometimes referred to as “general charter” laws).
- City councils and village boards have the **power to enact laws and policies, consistent with state law, regulating local and municipal affairs, usually through the enactment of ordinances and resolutions.** For example, enacting a city budget; defining the powers, functions, and duties of city officers and employees; providing governmental, recreational, educational, cultural, and social services; imposing taxes, as authorized by state law.

Fig. 1: Wisconsin's Many Local Governments
Organization and Number of Governments from 2017 Census



HOW TO UTILIZE STATE AND LOCAL LEGISLATURES

Wisconsin State Legislature Website and **City of Green Bay Website**

State Legislature

- You can follow a **particular bill's progress** through the legislature by finding its '**bill history**' page. Search on the Wisconsin State Legislature front page, under Law and Legislation, in the box where it says 'Find a proposal'. **You can search either by subject ('mining'), or by the bill's number if you know it ('AB20')**.
- Near the top of the page is the bill's subject and current status. Next are documents related to that bill. You can see more specifics on a bill's history at the bottom of this page.
- You can also **subscribe to the RSS feeds** or use the **email notification service** to receive notifications about proposals and committees that matter to you.
- If you'd like to **suggest a bill to the legislature, contact your legislators**. Links on how to find them here.
- **Members of the general public are welcome to attend Assembly and Senate sessions and committee hearings. In public committee hearings, you can speak before the committee on a particular bill.**

Local/County/Municipal Legislature (e.g. City of Green Bay)

- You can go to the City of Green Bay website (or your city/town/village or county website) and navigate to the **government section**, where you will find sections and information about elected officials; municipal codes; boards, commissions and committees; meetings, agendas, minutes; etc.
- Under the **common council section** you can find out who the **alder representative** is for where you reside. You can also be directed to the **meetings, agendas and minutes section** to find information about past and **upcoming council, committee or board meetings**.
- **Common council meetings are livestreamed and archived on their YouTube page**. Some committees, boards, and commissions have the option to join the meeting virtually.
- **If you want to speak or voice concerns at a public meeting or leave a comment, you can fill out the Comment Form** online ahead of time. Signing the form does not obligate you to speak. If you decide to speak, **keep your comments relevant to the topic being deliberated, and compose your comments to last around 3 minutes.**

HOW TO TESTIFY AT STATE LEGISLATURES

Testifying at State Hearings

- You can see the **hearing schedule for a committee** by going to this **[link](#)**: Either search for the committee on our search page, or search for its name in the search bar at the top of this page. You can also use the 'Committees' tab in the top menu to browse committees. Hearing notices are listed near the top of the page, immediately below the list of members.
- Members of the general public usually testify to express support or opposition to a bill, to suggest amendments, or to explain how it would affect them or others.
- **When you arrive, fill out a hearing slip and wait to be called by the committee.** If you can't stay for the entire hearing, notify the messenger or 'page', near the door, and ask to be called early.
- **Please keep your testimony to five minutes or less, and bring a copy of your testimony for each committee member.** In particularly long hearings, the length of testimony may be limited, usually to about three minutes.

Other Ways to participate

- You can **express your support or opposition to a bill without testifying.** **When you arrive, check the box on your hearing slip indicating that you support or oppose the bill but do not want to testify.** This will be noted in the committee's report to the Senate or Assembly.
- You can also attend without filling out a hearing notice. Please refrain from cheering, booing, or waving signs, to avoid intimidating those who provide testimony.
- If you can't attend a hearing in person, the WisconsinEye network broadcasts many hearings live on television and the internet, and records others for later broadcast.

LINKS &

RESOURCES

For More Information:

Go to the [Wisconsin State Legislature website](#) and review their [Citizen's Guide to the Legislature](#). You can also go to our [public advocacy database](#) for more information and resources!

NeighborWorks Green Bay Contact

Website: nwgreenbay.org

Email: advocacy@nwgreenbay.org

Instagram: [@nwgreenbay](#)

Phone: (920) 448-3075

Location: 437 S Jackson St, Green Bay, WI 54301