

ADVOCACY

Step 1 - Drafting

A legislator comes up with an idea for a bill and has the Legislative Reference Bureau draft it into bill form. The draft is then circulated for legislators to sign on as cosponsors. The bill is then introduced and given a number. Senate Bills are called SB#; Assembly Bills are AB#. **What you can do:**

- **Advocates can meet with their legislators to discuss problems that might be solved by legislation or to suggest specific bills.**
- **While in draft form, advocates can approach legislators to cosponsor.**

Step 2 - Referral

The Speaker of the Assembly or the President of the Senate refers the bill to committee for review. There are several dozen such committees. **What you can do:**

- **Sometimes the bill's sponsor can request a specific committee. If you legislator sponsors a bill at your request, you can ask if a particular committee might give a more favorable report.**

Step 3 - Hearings

After referral, most bills are scheduled for public hearings. The committee chair schedules the hearing, usually grouping several bills to have hearings on the same day. The legislative website <http://committeeschedule.legis.wisconsin.gov/> can tell you which committee is holding a hearing on a particular bill. Or click on [Education Committee Members](#) for information on how to reach the legislative offices of education committee members. **What you can do:**

- **It is most effective to have constituents of Education Committee members testify at a hearing. Kathy Campeau, WSRA's Legislative Chair, will coordinate testimony with WSRA's legislative consultant to ensure the most effective presentation. Those who are not comfortable speaking before a committee can attend the hearing and register in favor of or against a bill, or submit written testimony.**
- **If it is impossible to attend the hearing, you can still have an impact. Usually hearings are scheduled on short notice so there is no time for letters. If your legislator is on the [Education Committee](#) call the office and leave a message or send an email stating your position on the bill. (Be sure to include you home address in any email messages).**

Step 4 - Executive Session (informally called "Exec-ing the bill")

At an executive session, rarely held on the same days as the hearing, the committee will discuss and debate the bill, vote on whether or not to amend the bill, and finally recommend or not recommend the bill as amended for passage. Bills not recommended for passage rarely move forward in the legislative process and usually die in committee. **What you can do:**

- **There is usually enough time between the hearing and the executive session to write letters. ([See Tips for Contacting Your Legislator](#)) If you have a legislator on the committee, send a brief letter explaining your position on the bill, note that you are a member of the WSRA, and urge a vote for or against it. Organize 3-5 other people in the district to write also. A face-to-face meeting with your legislator is even more effective.**
- **If you don't have a legislator on the committee, it is still possible to have an effect. You can ask your own legislator (To find out who your legislator is go to <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/w3asp/waml/waml.aspx>) to speak to a committee member on your behalf. Also, you can write to the chair who has some responsibility to consider the wishes of the whole state.**

Step 5 - Joint Finance Committee

Bills that affect the state's budget must be reviewed by the Joint Finance Committee before advancing through the legislative process (JFC). JFC is composed of 16 members of the legislature, eight from each house. The majority party (Republicans) has 12 members on the committee and the minority party (Democrats) has four members. It's important to note that there are several members of the education committees who also serve on the JFC, making them important individuals indeed. (See <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/lfb/jfc.html> for a list of members on the JFC). This committee will hold hearings and executive sessions and will vote to change appropriations levels, amend policy contained in a bill, and vote to either recommend or not recommend passage of the bill as amended. If a bill is not recommended for passage, it usually dies in committee and will not advance further in the legislative process. **What you can do:**

- **The suggestions in Hearings and Executive Sessions also apply here.**

Step 6 - Floor Action

Each bill reported out of committee is then eligible to be scheduled for floor debate by the full body of the Senate or Assembly. The decision to schedule or not to schedule a bill for the floor is made by the Speaker in the State Assembly and the Majority Leader in the State Senate. For a listing of Senate officers go to <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senhome.htm>. For a listing of Assembly leaders go to <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/asmhome.htm>. At this stage in the process, any legislator may propose an amendment or substitute bill. The full body (Senate or Assembly) must vote on any amendments or substitutes before considering the main bill. **What you can do:**

- **Since every member of the Assembly or Senate will be involved now, every advocate should be involved also. Contact your legislator and urge action on the bill. The best move is to arrange a meeting with the legislator when the legislator is home in the district. The second best tactic is to write a letter. If neither is possible you can make a phone call. With either writing or calling, it's important to organize other WSRA members to do the same.**

Step 7 - The Second House

This is a repeat of the steps above, except a committee may exec a bill without a hearing. If the second house approves any amendments, the bill must return to the first house for further consideration. If the bill passes without amendment, the bill goes to the Governor to be signed into law. **What you can do:**

- **The suggestions in Floor Action above apply here.**

Step 8 - Conference Committees

If the Senate and Assembly versions of the bill are not identical, a conference committee is appointed by leaders in each house. Three members from each body resolve the differences and create a "Conference Report" which is a compromise version of the two bills. The Conference Report must then be voted on by both houses. It cannot be amended.

Step 9 - Governor's Office

After passing both houses, the bill goes to the Governor for his/her signature or veto. Bills that have appropriations in them can be vetoed in part. Bills that do not have appropriations can only be vetoed in whole. **What you can do:**

- **Advocates can call or write the Governor to urge his signature or veto.**