

**A Guide to
Government:
Wisconsin Edition**

Created by WMS-MSS LAC Medical Students

About the Guide

*This guide was created by medical students from the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health and the Medical College of Wisconsin. These students serve as members of the Wisconsin Medical Society Medical Student Section Legislative Action Committee. Seeing how important the the role of government is in healthcare, this guide was created to serve as a general starting point for Wisconsin residents to learn more about and to interact with the government in the state, in order to increase awareness and empower individuals to participate in civic engagement. **Your voice is important** in creating change for the state, and we hope that this guide helps you feel enabled to work towards creating that change. Happy learning!*



Table of Contents

1 Overview of Wisconsin Government

2 The State Legislative Branch

3 The State Judicial Branch

4 The State Executive Branch

5 General Voter Information

- **Eligibility & Registration Check**
- **How to Register**
- **What to Do Before You Vote**
- **How to Vote Absentee**

9 What is bill and how does it come to be?

How do I find policies? How do I follow a bill?

10 How do I find out who my representatives are? How do I contact my representatives?

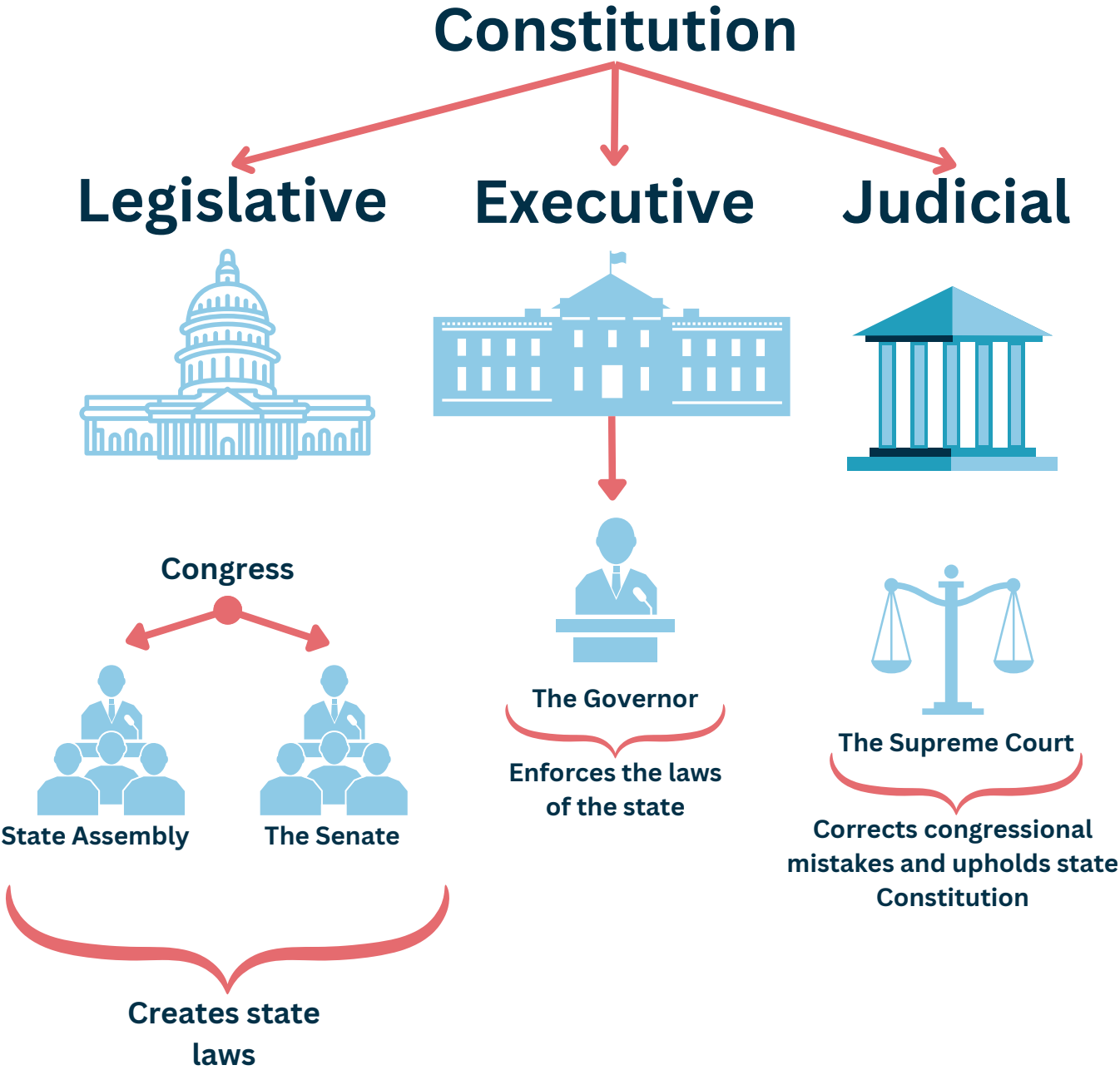
11 How do I testify at a hearing?

12 What should I say when I contact my representative or testify at a hearing?

13 References

Overview of Wisconsin Government & the Legislative Process

Wisconsin has three branches of government: the legislative, executive, and judicial branch, all governed by the state Constitution. The legislative branch is made up of the State Assembly (aka the House of Representatives or the House of Delegates) and State Senate. There are 99 Assembly Districts and 33 Senate Districts.



The State Legislative Branch

What is Congress and what does it do? Congress (sometimes called "the legislature") is the collective sum of elected state representatives in the House of Representatives and the Senate. Members are elected every other year. Congress is responsible for writing and reviewing bills before they are sent to the Governor, who will veto or pass the bill.

What is the State Assembly and what does it do?

The State Assembly (also called the House of Representatives) is the "lower" house of Congress. Each elected representative serves a two-year term.

What is the Senate and what does it do?

The Senate is the "upper" house of Congress. Each elected representative serves a four-year term.

Legislative



Congress



State Assembly



The Senate



Creates state laws

The State Judicial Branch

What is the Judicial Branch?

The Judicial Branch is responsible for deciding which laws created in the legislature are constitutional (or not), and to resolve conflicts on a local, state, or federal level that occur in relation to the state.

Who runs the Judicial Branch and who makes up this branch?

The Wisconsin Court System makes up the State Judicial Branch. This system is comprised of trial courts (i.e. circuit courts), the Court of Appeals, and the Wisconsin Supreme Court. The Wisconsin Supreme Court is the highest court in the state.

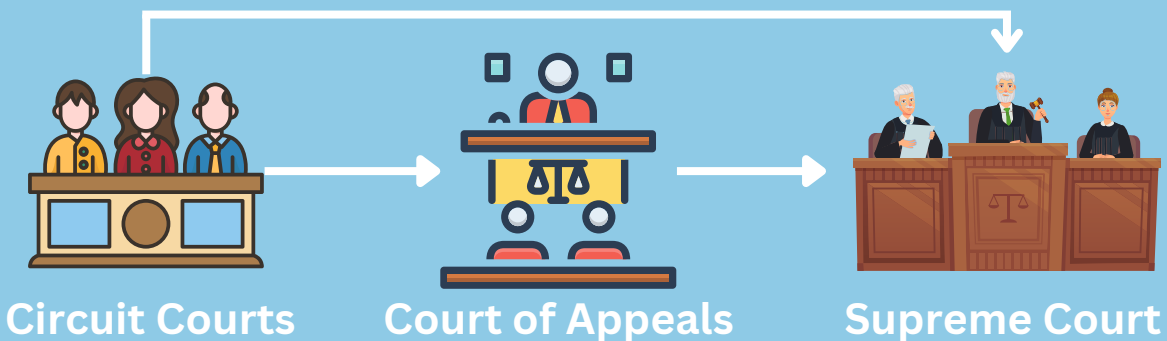
Judicial



The Supreme Court

Corrects congressional mistakes and upholds state Constitution

Order of the Wisconsin Court System

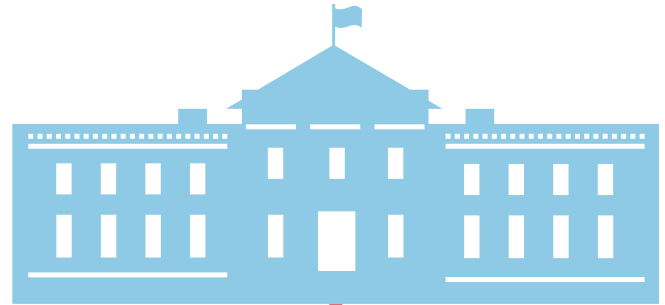


The State Executive Branch

What is the Executive Branch and what does it do? The Executive Branch is responsible for executing the laws passed on by the legislature. Within this branch, the Governor has the power to approve or veto laws passed by legislature. However, the legislature can overturn a veto with a two-thirds majority vote by each house.

Who runs the Executive Branch? The state Executive Branch is run by the Governor who serves as the state's chief executive. The governor serves four-year terms with no limits. However, there are five other elected members of the Executive Branch, including: Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, State Treasurer, Attorney General, and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Executive



The Governor

**Enforces the laws
of the state**

General Voter Information: Voter Eligibility & Registration Check



Voter eligibility requirements:

- Must be a US citizen
- Must be 18 yrs old at the time of the election
- Must reside at your current WI address for at least 28 consecutive days prior to the election with no intent to move
- Must not be serving a sentence for a felony conviction, including probation, parole, or supervision

Check your voter registration:

Step 1: Visit the following link: <https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/>

Step 2: On the homepage, click the blue circle that says "Register to vote"

Step 3: Search your registration status by typing in your first name, last name, and date of birth

Step 4: A new page will populate that will tell you the status of your registration

- If you are registered but want to update your address or change your name, click on the blue link that says "Update Name" or "Address"
- If you are not registered or your name does not appear, click the red hyperlink that reads "Register to Vote"

General Voter Information: Registering to Vote

1

Go to <https://myvote.wi.gov>

2

Click “Register to Vote”

- Check to see if you’re already registered to vote
- You will need to register if you’re a first-time voter
- You will need to re-register if you have moved to a new address or changed apartments
- You will need to re-register if you have changed your legal name since you last voted

3

Continue on to the registration process

- You need a valid, unexpired Wisconsin Driver's License number or Wisconsin State ID number
- The name, date of birth, and address at the DMV must match in order to register

4

Complete all steps 2-6 as provided on the website

5

Once finished, you can print or email yourself your voter card

6

Mail or deliver this voter registration form to your municipal clerk, along with documentation of a proof of residence

7

If you do not meet the above requirements but are still eligible, you can register via mail

- Complete the voter registration form ([link](#)) ([link for download in 24 languages](#))
- Mail it or deliver it to your Municipal clerk
- You must bring proof of residence with you

General Voter Information: Before You Vote



Do you know which poll to go to?

Visit <https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/Find-My-Polling-Place>, type in your address and your polling place will pop up!



Do you have an acceptable form of ID?

If you have a valid WI ID, all you need is that and a proof of residence. If not, visit <https://bringit.wi.gov/> to determine what else are acceptable forms.



Are you a UW Madison undergraduate or graduate student without a WI State ID?

You'll need to obtain a free UW-Madison **student voter-compliant ID** by visiting the Wiscard office at Union South during normal hours of operation. Or, you can request an **electronic voter ID**.



Are you an MCW medical student without a WI State ID?

If you do not have a WI ID or US Passport, you can get an MCW Voter ID through the security office.

THAT'S IT, YOU'RE READY TO VOTE!

General Voter Information: Voting Absentee

How to request an absentee ballot:

1. Visit the following link: <https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/>
2. On the homepage, click the blue circle that says "Vote Absentee by Mail"
3. Type in your first name, last name, and date of birth
4. A new page will populate that will give the option to click on "Request Your Absentee Ballot"
5. Fill out the form and give the address you want your ballot to be sent to
6. Upload a PDF scan of your driver's license or similar ID form
7. You can expect to receive your absentee ballot by mail in 3-4 days
8. Fill out your ballot in the presence of an adult witness and then drop it off at the nearest post office drop box
9. It will take another 3-4 days for your ballot to be received and processed

THAT'S IT, YOU VOTED!

**Note: you can always track your absentee ballot at <https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/>*



What is a bill and how does it come to be?

*The Legislative Process has a series of steps in order for an idea to become a **bill** and eventually be signed into law and during this process, the public is able to follow the bill along at each step.*

***Step 1:** The idea : a representative (or a citizen, like you!) can formulate an idea that will be written by a representative*

***Step 2:** Introduction: the bill is first read to the senate or assembly and allows legislators to voice their initial support*

***Step 3:** Committees: the bill is sent to the relevant committee to refine the bill (i.e., public hearings for experts and constituents to weigh in, legislator revision process to ensure it is legal and impactful, discussions on financial aspects)*

***Step 4:** Back to the Floor: bill is read again to the entire legislature and amended, as needed, before being read a third (and final) time where it is voted on*

***Step 5:** Sent to the Governor: bill is read by the governor who can sign or veto; veto can be overridden by legislature with $\frac{2}{3}$ majority vote*

***Step 6:** Enacted Bill becomes an Act (a signed bill has an “effective date,” which is when it becomes an Act and can be enforced as law; from here, the process restarts where new ideas for an Act can become amendments)*

How Do I Find Policies?

Did you hear about a new bill or policy and are interested in learning more about it? Visit <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/search> to learn more. Follow the directions below to access the desired information:

How Do I Follow a Bill?

Visit <https://legis.wisconsin.gov/about/follow> to stay updated on your bill of interest.

How Do I Find Out Who My Representatives Are?

How to find out who your representatives are:

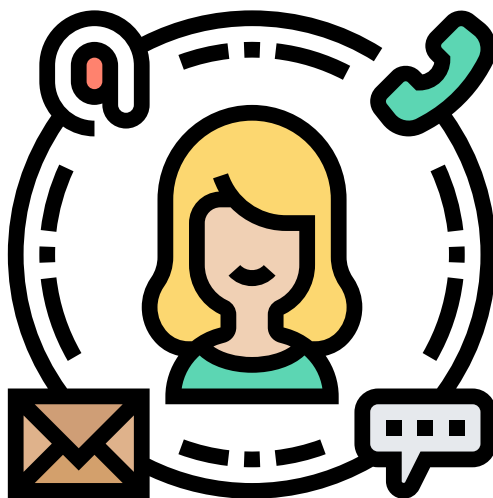
1. Visit the following link: <https://maps.legis.wisconsin.gov/>
2. Enter your address into the top right search bar
3. Your state representatives will populate!

How Do I Contact My Representatives?

Follow the steps listed above.

- **By phone or email:** Once your representatives populate, their phone numbers and email addresses will be listed under their names.
- **By mail:** Once your representatives populate, click on the name of the representative you would like to contact. This will bring you to their personal page. Their P.O. Box mailing address will be listed below their picture.
- **In-person:** Once your representatives populate, click on the name of the representative you would like to contact. This will bring you to their personal page. Their office address in the capitol will be listed below their picture.

See page #12 for what to say when you contact your representatives!



How Do I Testify at a Hearing?

While in committee, each bill has a public hearing held where members of the public can come and testify about the legislation.

There are 3 types of testimony you can give:

1. In support of the legislation
2. In opposition of the legislation
3. For information only- an opportunity to provide legislators facts or perspective about the bill and it's potential impact



How to testify:

1. Prepare a 3-minute testimony describing who you are, what the issue is, why they should care, and what you are asking them to do (see page #12)
 - a. Print multiple copies of your testimony to handout to the committee members
 - b. Practice!
2. Arrive to the meeting early and fill out a hearing slip
3. When called, give your oral testimony and take questions from the committee!
 - a. If there is a question you are not sure of the answer to, that is okay. Say you do not know but that you will get back to them with the answer. This can be a great way to keep the conversation going and build relationships with the legislators!

What should I say when I contact my representative or testify at a hearing?

- 1** *Identify who you are and what the issue is*
State who you are, who you are a constituent of, and the issue you are speaking about. If there is a specific piece of legislation, mention the bill number.
- 2** *Why should they care?*
Explain why the issue is important and support your position with facts.
- 3** *Why do you care?*
Make it personal by talking about your experience with the issue.
- 4** *Make the ask*
Ask them to support or oppose the issue
- 5** *Thank them*
Thank them for their time!

References

1. <https://legis.wisconsin.gov/about/what>
2. <https://legis.wisconsin.gov/lc/new-legislator-conference/judicial-and-executive-branches/#:~:text=The%20Judicial%20Branch&text=Wisconsin's%20two%20levels%20of%20appellate,is%20the%20state's%20highest%20court>.
3. https://legis.wisconsin.gov/lc/media/1760/citizen_testify_final.pdf
4. <https://maps.legis.wisconsin.gov/>