

The Legislature is the branch of government which establishes governmental policy and services. Under the Washington Constitution, the Legislature meets in Olympia for a legislative session every year, beginning the second Monday in January. In odd-numbered years, the legislative session is 105 days; in even-numbered years, the legislative session is 60 days.

There are 49 Districts in Washington state, each with one Senator and two Representatives. The Senate consists of 49 individuals, who serve for 4-year terms. Each Senator lives in and represents 1 legislative district. Senator's terms are staggered: Voters elect about half of the Senators in every even-numbered year's election.

The House consists of 98 elected officials who serve two-year terms. Every legislative district in Washington has two representatives who live in and represent the district. Voters elect the 98 representatives in every even-numbered year's election.

Both Senators and Representatives serve on several committees that meet frequently during session to discuss proposed laws and hear input from the public. The process is governed by many laws, rules, and procedures, making it both systematic and complicated because it is designed to facilitate thorough deliberations on issues that can have far-reaching effects on Washingtonians.

## Functions of the Legislature

**Taxation and spending** – Determines the level and means by which citizens will be taxed and how tax dollars will be appropriated.

**Public policy enactment** – Writes and modifies the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) in order to protect or restrict citizens, institute civil and criminal code, establish standards, etc.

**Oversight** – Regulates other branches of state government, (including itself) by establishing rules and by its power of impeachment.

**Assistance** – Helps constituents understand and work with state government.



## Member and Staff Roles

### Leadership

There are leadership roles in both chambers that help manage rules and process. These are elected positions, and are posted on the site by chamber.

- [Senate leadership](#)
- [House leadership](#)

Descriptions for each leadership role can be found in the [Guide to Lawmaking](#) document.

### Senate and House administration

In addition to elected officials, professional legislative staff assists the conduct of the official proceedings. Chamber administrators can be found here:

- [Senate administration](#)
- [House administration](#)

Descriptions for each leadership role can be found in the [Guide to Lawmaking](#) document.

### Committees and committee staff

Committees hold public hearings on bills, vote in executive sessions, and study issues in work sessions. Committees are divided by topics, and bills are generally referred to the most relevant committee. After a bill has been sent to the appropriate committee, a committee staffer is assigned to each bill to provide further research and drafting assistance to members. View committee information:

- [Senate committees](#)
- [House committees](#)

Descriptions about each committee, upcoming activity, and contact information for members and staff can be found on the individual committee pages.

*If you are a person with a disability and need a special accommodation, please contact the House at (360) 786-7271, or the Senate at (360) 786-7189. TTY 1-800-833-6388. For further legislative information, call the Legislative Hotline at 1-800-562-6000, or check the internet at [www.leg.wa.gov](http://www.leg.wa.gov).*

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## Caucus staff

Caucus refers to a group within a legislative body seeking to represent a specific interest. Each chamber has a Republican and Democratic caucus who provide members with partisan policy, communications, and administrative support.

- Senate Caucuses: <https://leg.wa.gov/about-the-legislature/senate/>
- House Caucuses: <https://leg.wa.gov/about-the-legislature/house-of-representatives/>

## Lobbyists and Legislative Liaisons

Lobbyists play an important role in the legislative process and can be helpful to members by providing input and specialized information on the issues they represent.

The Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) regulates political disclosure to inform the public about campaign finances, lobbyist spending, and public official and candidate financial affairs. <https://www.pdc.wa.gov/>

## Legislative Agencies

Legislative agencies are special organizations that support the Legislature. They provide services that other legislative groups cannot. There are currently nine legislative agencies. Their information and site links are available here: <https://leg.wa.gov/about-the-legislature/legislative-agencies/>.

## Bills, Resolutions, and Memorials

A **bill** is a written proposal to enact a law. While it may seem like the legislative system is unnecessarily complicated, it is designed for most bills to fail. Hundreds of bills are introduced every session. *Out of all bills introduced, less than 20 percent become law.*

One of the most important functions of the legislative process is to thoroughly vet all proposed legislation by requiring bills to be carefully studied, debated, and amended. This screening process serves a vital purpose by closely examining all bills before they become law.

**Resolutions** and **memorials** are written motions expressing the wishes and recommendations of the Legislature, and some resolutions have the effect of law for a temporary period.

A **Joint Memorial** is a message or petition addressed to the President and/or Congress of the United States, or the head of any other branch of federal government asking for consideration of some matter of concern to the state or region, or of universal interest.

A **Joint Resolution** may propose an amendment to the Constitution for reference to the people for acceptance or rejection, or it may formulate a legislative directive to state administrative officers and agencies. Joint resolutions which propose to amend the Constitution must receive a two-thirds affirmative vote of all members elected in each house to pass.

A **Concurrent Resolution** is a statement of policy concurred in by both houses. It may relate to the joint rules, to internal operations of the Legislature as a unit of government, or it can create and assign duties to an interim committee.

A **Floor Resolution** relates only to the business of the house in which it originates. It is not considered by the other house, it is treated as a written motion, and may be adopted by a voice vote.

Joint memorials and joint resolutions are subject to all procedural rules governing the course of bills. Concurrent resolutions require a roll call vote only when they authorize investigating committees and/or allocate or authorize expenditure of any funds; otherwise, they may be treated as motions and adopted without a roll call.

## Budgets

Passing the state's budget is one of the most important tasks of the Legislature. In this process, the Legislature and the Governor's Office work separately to create an overall budget each biennium. In December preceding an odd-numbered year, the Office of Financial Management (*part of the Governor's Office*) releases a budget based on a forecast of state revenues. By law, the Governor has to propose a balanced budget; however, it is not constitutionally mandated that the final budget passed by the Legislature be balanced. Still, the budget passed by the Legislature traditionally is balanced. The Legislature then reviews the Governor's proposed budget before drafting their own proposed budget.

In odd-numbered years, the Legislature passes three budgets, *Operating*, *Capital*, and *Transportation*, which together make up the state's budget for the next two years. The *Supplemental Budget* is passed in even-numbered years, which includes three separate bills in each chamber: the supplemental operating, capital, and transportation budgets.

Details about the budgets and links to additional information is available on [Fiscal.wa.gov](https://www.fiscal.wa.gov/).