

A high-angle photograph of the Wisconsin State Capitol building at sunset. The building's iconic green dome is illuminated from within, and the sky is a mix of orange, pink, and blue. The foreground is filled with lush green trees, and modern city buildings are visible in the background.

Advocacy Network Grassroots Toolkit

How to Impact the Legislative Process



STATE BAR OF WISCONSIN

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Introduction



Why grassroots lobbying?

What you have to say matters, and not just because you are a constituent and you vote. Your perspectives provide valuable insight for legislators who might not be familiar with all of the intricacies and complexities of the legal system or a particular area of law. At a time when the number of lawyer-legislators in government is on a long-term decline, it is more essential than ever that elected officials hear from you. Grassroots efforts coordinate and amplify the voice of the legal profession, ensuring that those who write our laws hear from those that practice it.

The State Bar of Wisconsin grassroots program, the Advocacy Network, empowers you to become involved on the frontlines of public policy debates. State Bar Advocacy staff will provide you the information, the insight, the strategy, and the assistance you need to affect the legislative process. Members of the State Bar bring a unique ability to explain complex legal issues to legislators and show them how those issues affect their districts.

While it takes positions on matters that affect the legal profession and access to justice, the State Bar of Wisconsin is prohibited by the Wisconsin Supreme Court from endorsing candidates, making political contributions, or having a political action committee (PAC). This means that your involvement in grassroots advocacy is vital to the success of the State Bar's legislative efforts.

The State Bar Advocacy program has been instrumental in a wide variety of legal, court, and justice related issues over the years. Those successes include:

- state-level funding for civil legal services;
- historic increases to private bar public defense pay rates;
- the creation or complete revisions of Wisconsin statutes on corporate, nonstock, limited liability, business entity, power of attorney, and child custody and placement laws, among others.

The State Bar is instrumental in fighting for the court system and the people it protects; ensuring competitive pay for judges, prosecutors, and defenders; and the expansion of courts across the state when needed.

The Advocacy program has developed this handbook to empower you as a grassroots advocate. Together, we can impact the legislative process.

grassroots

/ 'gras.r̄oots /

noun

1. the most basic level of an activity or organization.

"the whole campaign would be conducted at the grassroots"

- ordinary people regarded as the main body of an organization's membership.

"you have lost touch with the grassroots of the party"

Definition from Oxford Languages

The Advocacy Network



The Advocacy Network is composed of State Bar of Wisconsin members, leaders, volunteers and staff who work together to advance the legislative policies of the State Bar, as set forth by the State Bar's Board of Governors. Priority policy positions, as well as the handbook that lists the full range of the State Bar's legislative positions can be found online by going to www.wisbar.org/GovRelations and clicking on State Bar Policy Positions on the right-hand side of the screen.

The Action Center:

www.wisbar.org/GovRelations

The Action Center is an online tool for State Bar members that allows you to quickly and easily:

- monitor important legislation in real time;
- find your own legislators to communicate via email, social media, or phone calls; and
- take action on topics of importance to the State Bar.

Government Relations

[Videos](#) | [Our Priority Issues](#) | [Related Links](#)

The State Bar's Government Relations program connects State Bar members with state government officials-- including legislators, executive and judicial branch agencies and their staff--to improve the administration of justice and the delivery of legal services in Wisconsin. The Government Relations team is the lobbying arm of the State Bar and some of its practice sections. It is also responsible for tracking Supreme Court Rules and fostering effective communication and relations with the judicial branch.

The State Bar of Wisconsin takes legislative positions on general policy items of importance to the legal profession; these are expressed in the [Board of Governor Policy Positions](#). In addition to positions on behalf of the entire membership, 15 practice sections lobby on behalf of their own members; these are expressed in the State Bar of Wisconsin [Practice Section Positions](#).

For updates from inside the Capitol dome, read the State Bar of Wisconsin's monthly e-newsletter, [the Rotunda Report](#)



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SEND A MESSAGE TO YOUR LAWMAKERS

Fix the Rural Attorney Shortage

Rural Wisconsin simply doesn't have enough attorneys. Loan repayment programs have been proposed as a way to attract attorneys to rural areas, but previous efforts to create such a program have fallen short in the legislature. Let lawmakers know what you think about fixing the rural attorney shortage.

TAKE ACTION

LEARN MORE



Address Student Debt

A recent ABA Young Lawyer Division survey shows 75% of law school students graduated with over \$100,000 in debt, which negatively affects the lives and career choices of many attorneys, in addition to having a broader impact on the American economy and the ability of Americans to access critical legal services. Call on Congress to address the student loan debt crisis through loan forgiveness, strengthening the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (PSLF), permitting borrowers to refinance their federal student loans, and enacting legislation to allow student debt to be discharged in bankruptcy proceedings without showing undue hardship.

TAKE ACTION

LEARN MORE



COMPOSE YOUR OWN MESSAGE



Street Address

Zip

GO

Sending a message to your lawmakers



Step 1:

Go to
<https://wisbar.org/GovRelations>

Step 2:

Click "Take Action" on a topic, or choose "Compose Your Own." Enter your address to find your representatives.

Government Relations

[Videos](#) | [Our Priority Issues](#) | [Related Links](#)

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[TAKE ACTION](#)

[LEARN MORE](#)


COMPOSE YOUR OWN MESSAGE



Street Address Zip [GO](#)

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[TAKE ACTION](#) [LEARN MORE](#) [SUPPORTERS](#)

CONTACT INFORMATION

Prefix (required)

First Name (required)

Last Name (required)

Email (required)

Mobile or Home Phone (required)

2642 E Dayton St
Madison, WI 53704-5022

I would like to change my address

Bar ID

Remember Me

I would like to continue to receive email from the State Bar's Advocacy Network (unchecking will permanently unsubscribe you)

I would like to receive text messages about this campaign

[SEND](#)

[PRINT AND MAIL](#)

[PREVIEW](#)

MESSAGE

Sen. Ron Johnson (R-WI)

Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-WI)

Rep. Mark Pocan (D-WI-02)

Subject: Address the Debt

Dear [[Recipient's Title and Name]]:

As a legal professional and constituent, I am deeply concerned by the amount of student debt crushing new lawyers and their families. On average, law school graduates leave school owing more than \$150,000 in student loan debt.

Lawyers may not be the first group that comes to mind when discussing issues related to student debt, but many attorneys accept lower-paying positions in public service, at non-profits that assist low-income and vulnerable individuals, or provide hard-to-find legal services to residents in the most rural areas of the country.

Federal lawmakers can alleviate this student debt burden by providing relief through loan forgiveness, strengthening the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (PSLF), permitting borrowers to refinance their federal student loans,

Step 3:

Customize the [subject line](#) and [message](#), then send the email to the selected lawmakers. On some alerts, you can also find talking points to call the office, or automatically tweet @ your lawmakers!

Understanding the process



Establish Positions – The State Bar Board of Governors (BOG), through the BOG Policy Committee, and lobbying sections work with Advocacy staff to establish policy positions. Each legislative session, priority policies are chosen that staff and leaders believe are the most urgent or promising opportunities for change.

Local Intelligence – Members of the State Bar are needed to report back what they've heard from their legislators, how meetings went, what issues are important in their legislative districts, and what local and/or social media is saying about legal and legislative issues. The information we receive from you helps us to shape, refine, and reorient legislative strategy and informs our overall approach.

Directing Advocacy – Advocacy staff monitor (or in some cases initiate) legislation of importance on behalf of the State Bar and/or its practice sections. The Advocacy Team use their knowledge and political experience to develop and implement effective legislative strategies.

Grassroots Action – The Advocacy Team works to mobilize various segments of the State Bar membership when the need for grassroots action arises. This includes email "action alerts," public policy position papers, organizing constituent meetings with legislators, and updates and policy articles featured in Rotunda Report and InsideTrack™.

Legislative Activities – The Advocacy Team work with State Bar and section leaders to develop policy papers and written testimony, meet with legislators, work with the media and more to impact the legislative process. They simultaneously work to communicate, educate, and activate State Bar members to grassroots lobby through the Advocacy Network.

Becoming an advocate



State Bar of Wisconsin Advocacy staff rely on efforts from the State Bar President, Board of Governors, section leaders, and members for help in three key advocacy areas — grassroots, communications, and Advocacy Network meetings.

Getting involved in grassroots

It's important to contact your elected officials via phone or email to weigh in on issues that affect the legal practice and/or impact access to justice. It's just as important to notify State Bar Advocacy staff to let them know you've contacted your legislators on a topic, so that we can follow up or coordinate your efforts with other members across the state. Using the Advocacy Network online tools automates this process.

- **Send an email.** The State Bar periodically sends out “action alerts” by email, requesting members to customize then send a pre-written message to members of the Legislature or Congress on important topics.
- **Write a letter.** Hand writing something can garner extra attention. Addresses can be found in the online “Action Center” directory.
- **Call.** The person on the phone will ask your name and home address to verify that you're a constituent. State your position on a bill (get the bill number in advance), be polite, and be brief. If you are answering a State Bar action alert, talking points for phone calls will be provided to you.

Communicating with legal colleagues

- Periodically provide brief updates on government activities and legislative updates that affect the judicial system or the legal profession. “Advocacy Ambassadors,” or State Bar volunteer leaders, will be given regular updates by the State Bar Advocacy staff.
- Encourage legal grassroots participation. Remind your colleagues that other voices—including those who take positions that may be at odds with the legal profession—are highly engaged in the legislative and political process.
- Utilize the State Bar's Priority Issue Factsheets, Action Alert talking points, or other materials.
- Direct questions or concerns to the State Bar's Advocacy Team.

Constituent contacts

Lawmakers find constituent contacts persuasive--the more personal, the better.



Setting up an Advocacy Network meeting



Advocacy Network meetings typically involve State Bar members, staff, and legislators. The goals are to:

- to get to know your legislator;
- share what's going on in your firm, bar association, or your practice from your perspective(s); and
- explain State Bar legislative issues that we'd like the elected official to support or oppose.

State Bar Advocacy staff will assist you in setting up Advocacy Network meetings and recruiting State Bar members and lawmakers to attend. Someone from the State Bar Advocacy Team can also be present. These meetings are a great way to start building long-term relationships between State Bar members and legislators.

Contact Devin Martin (dmartin@wisbar.org) to discuss setting up a meeting.



Elected officials meet with State Bar members and leaders in Milwaukee, January 2019.



State Bar of Wisconsin and Fond du Lac Bar Association members meet with their elected representatives for a lunch meeting discussion in April, 2019.

Members of the Kenosha Bar Association and State Bar meet at Ashleigh on the Lough restaurant to hear from local lawmakers.



Communicating with elected officials



Building relationships

Good politics depends on ongoing ties with both your legislators and their staff.

One of the most effective ways to build or maintain a relationship with your elected official is to get to know staff in your legislator's office. Legislative offices are always looking for activities while the legislator is in their district – they generally welcome suggestions for events, especially if there is some press and media potential.

Remember that all correspondence, meetings, or events with elected officials should ideally be coordinated with the State Bar's Advocacy Team. Coordination helps to ensure that we are meeting with the appropriate legislators at the appropriate time, and our effectiveness is maximized.

There are a wide variety of ways to interact with your elected officials. You can:

- arrange a lunch, dinner, or reception in honor of a particular legislator or the passage of a new law;
- invite members to speak at local bar association conferences or meetings;
- recognize your legislator's activities on behalf of your local bar in a newsletter;
- award a particularly responsive legislator with a certificate or plaque; or
- use social media or a favored local newspaper to give credit or thanks to your legislator or draw attention to a pressing issue.

The Advocacy Team can work with you on any of these methods.

Tips and tricks

There are four primary ways to communicate with elected officials:

- ▶ written correspondence (email, letters), telephone calls, social media, and personal visits

While each method is different, certain guidelines hold true for all of them.

- **Be accurate and brief.** Keep the communication succinct and never give false or misleading information.
- **Personalize your message.** Cite examples from your own experience to support your position. Present examples of how the issue will impact your community, the profession, the courts, your clients, and the administration of justice.
- **Be prepared.** Study the history of the issue. Know your opponent's arguments and how to refute them. Also, find out where your legislator stands on the issue. (Contact a member of the Advocacy Team for help with this.)
- **Be politically aware.** Every issue has multiple sides and your opposition likely has some advocates who are also constituents of your legislator or member of Congress. Always remember that by supporting your side of an issue, a legislator may go against someone else. They need to be convinced that the choice is factually and/or morally correct and politically wise. Never, by word or action, intimate to a legislator that since you contributed to their campaign, you expect support on an issue.
- **Be courteous/don't threaten.** Never threaten your legislator – don't say things like, "I'll never vote for you again." Keep in mind there may be other issues where you or the State Bar will work with this legislator – a cordial relationship keeps that door open.
- **Be patient.** Affecting policy change is a long-term process, so don't be discouraged if the results of your efforts are not immediately apparent. In politics, relationships take time to develop, and it's the cumulative results that matter most.

Sample letter to an elected official



Writing a letter to your elected official is one of the most impactful steps you can take. Remember a few basic tips:

- ▶ Be courteous and informative.
- ▶ State the purpose of the letter and focus on that message.
- ▶ Restate your request.
- ▶ Refrain from exaggeration.
- ▶ Avoid insults, jargon, and acronyms.
- ▶ Notify the State Bar Advocacy Team of your letter.

How to address a member of the U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable [First Name Last Name]
U.S. House of Representatives
[Office No.] Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman(woman) [Last Name]:

How to address a member of the U.S. Senate

The Honorable [First Name Last Name]
U.S. Senate
[Office No.] Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator [Last Name]:

Dear [Title Full Name],

State the reason for your letter in the first sentence, and the bill number or legislation you would like them to support accompanied by a brief description. Mention that you are a voter in their district as well as a lawyer or judge, and why you feel it is necessary that they understand why this issue is important to you.

State reasons why they should support your position. You may use facts and references when appropriate and citations when necessary to strengthen your argument and enhance your credibility, but generally don't overload your letter with details. It's more important to use personal narratives to illustrate why you care about the issue and how it impacts you, your practice, and/or your community.

Be brief, specific, and concise. Limit your letter to one page. Keep the tone of your letter positive, and never threaten political or other consequences.

Thank them for considering your request. Lastly, tell them you look forward to their response on this issue.

Sign your name (and if appropriate, share your title/position and affiliations)

Using the media



The media can help shape public opinion on important issues. When used properly, it can be an effective tool to educate and influence not only your elected officials, but your legal colleagues and members of the public. It is a great way to notify the community and legislators of the significance or complexity of proposed legislation.

Most newspapers accept short opinion pieces, called Letters to the Editor (or LTEs), and run them in the “Op-Ed” section of the news. LTEs are great ways to alert the general public about problems that need to be addressed in the justice system. They are also great ways to applaud your legislator’s stance on an issue or a recent accomplishment—and this goes a long way to fostering good long-term relations.

Please contact State Bar Advocacy staff if you intend to submit an LTE on a State Bar issue. We may be able to provide timely and relevant information that you may not be aware of regarding our media strategies, or information that you would like to include in your letter. An effective media strategy requires “staying on message,” and State Bar staff can help you to ensure that your efforts are as effective as possible.

Tips on LTEs:

- Keep it brief. Generally, LTE’s are between 100 and 200 words (check your local paper for specific word limits).
- Give your full name, address, and telephone number. The newspaper usually won’t publish your direct contact information, but anonymous letters generally aren’t published.
- Keep to the point and use accurate facts. Don’t use too many background details.
- Be polite, even when you passionately disagree with the story or issue you are responding to.
- Don’t get discouraged if your letter isn’t published. Editors receive countless letters, and they simply don’t have room to publish them all. Try again with a different angle or look for a new opportunity to respond. Also, be sure to check the online version of your newspaper—sometimes LTE’s can get published in an online-only version and get missed!

Sample Letter to the Editor

As an attorney, I believe that Wisconsin needs reform when it comes to expungement--the ability of people to clear their records of minor offenses if they have completed their sentence and haven’t had any other run-ins with the law.

Research shows that even minimal interaction with the criminal justice system can have a significant detrimental impact on a person’s life. The consequences of a criminal record can be a life-long barrier to success, presenting obstacles to employment, housing, and education. Expungement reform gives people the opportunity for a new start and can help alleviate workforce shortages.

It’s time to remove unnecessary burdens from those who have paid their debts to society for minor offenses. A bill to reform expungement has already passed the Wisconsin Assembly in spring of this year, but awaits a vote in our state Senate. I encourage all readers to contact their state Senator and ask them to vote for this important legislation.

Leveraging social media



The rise of social media in the last decade has transformed the ways people communicate, interact, and see the world. This is just as true for elected officials, most of whom use social media accounts to post about their opinions, legislative updates, and to hear from constituents.

Believe it or not, social media is one of the quickest and most effective ways to have your elected officials hear your opinion. Legislative staff regularly monitor accounts and relay your messages to your legislators. In addition, the general public can also see your message, creating a booster effect that can encourage other people to speak up.

The two most popular platforms for elected officials are Twitter and Facebook. To find an elected official, try searching for their first and last name, as well as their title. For example, search *“Representative Herbie Hancock,”* or *“State Senator Christine Farley.”* If you have trouble finding your legislators’ social media accounts, or have other questions, reach out to the State Bar’s Grassroots Coordinator Devin Martin at dmartin@wisbar.org.

Important tips:

- Always “tag” your legislator in a tweet by adding an “@” before the Twitter handle.
- Always post Facebook comments on the page or personal account of the official you want to communicate with.
- Twitter has a strict 280-character limit (or around 55 words on average).
- Facebook doesn’t have a word limit, but shorter is generally better.

Or try the easy way

Action alerts on wisbar.org/GovRelations will often have an option to automatically send a social media message to lawmakers. Simply click on the gray Twitter or Facebook icon to bring up a pre-written tweet directed at the social media profile of your lawmakers (if one exists). Edit and personalize the message, then send!

CIVIL LEGAL AID HELPS WISCONSIN

When people lack legal assistance in civil matters, it impedes justice and increases costs for taxpayers. It's time to move Wisconsin from being the lowest civil legal aid funder in the region to a state that puts common sense into practice.



TAKE ACTION

LEARN MORE

SUPPORTERS



The gray links above allow you to email, call, and tweet your legislators. All text fields are editable, so please take a moment to put them into your own words.

Advocacy Ambassador



What is an Advocacy Ambassador?

The Advocacy Ambassador is a State Bar volunteer that helps expand, amplify, and coordinate the voice of the legal profession to the legislature by working with the State Bar Advocacy Team. Advocacy Ambassadors are point people at local bar associations, law firms, courts, and solo practices across the state.

What's in it for you?

Leadership development, opportunity, visibility, and impact. Advocacy Ambassadors receive timely and regular legislative information, so they can then be seen as a resource at their local organization, firm, courthouse, or community.

An Advocacy Ambassador helps the legal profession and expands access to justice by providing action and input on legislative policy items as well as strategic direction and assistance to the State Bar Advocacy Team.

Who would make a good Advocacy Ambassador?

Advocacy Ambassadors should have an interest in public policy, a strong understanding of our priority issues (civil legal aid, criminal justice reform, funding the justice system, etc.), and the ability to speak for your firm, local or affinity bar on matters of public policy (or simply for yourself as an individual and State Bar member). Having some flexibility in work schedule can help, too.

Duties

- Keep informed of legislative and governmental issues that impact your local/affinity bar, law firm, or court as well as the legal profession as a whole.
- Contact both state and federal legislators on emerging issues and encourage other State Bar members, including both attorneys and judges as appropriate, to do the same.
- Be the liaison within your organization for advocacy actions and initiatives.
- Attend and/or help host local Advocacy Network meetings.



Family Law Section members Jolene Schneider and Paul Stenzel testify in favor of an initiative they brought to the legislature.



Because of Atty David Karp and Commissioner Mark Fremgen's involvement at the Capitol, a Family Law Section legislative initiative was signed into law only a few months later.

“It is the stories that you bring from the work that you do that legislators listen to. They need to hear directly from the people who work in those areas.”

Cheryl Daniels
Past President, State Bar of Wisconsin



Advocacy Ambassador Recognition checklist



What is the Advocacy Ambassador Recognition?

Some individuals, firms, local or affinity Bar associations go above and beyond to help achieve our shared advocacy goals. For these efforts, we are pleased to present these members with our Advocacy Ambassador Recognition.

Advocacy Ambassador Recognitions will be published on Wisbar.org, Rotunda Report,

Inside Track, and *Wisconsin Lawyer* — reaching thousands of attorneys, judges, and opinion leaders throughout Wisconsin. In addition, all Advocacy Ambassadors will be recognized at the State Bar Annual Meeting and Conference.

Complete at least four of the five goals to earn Advocacy Leader status and return your checklist to Devin Martin (dmartin@wisbar.org) by April 31, 2023.

ADVOCACY AMBASSADOR RECOGNITION CHECKLIST

Achieve at least four goals from the list.

GOAL 1: (organization): Name an Advocacy Ambassador

GOAL 1: (individual): Send at least two emails, one social media post, and one phone call to an elected official using the Advocacy Network software

Date Completed

Notes

GOAL 2: Participate in publicizing at least one State Bar “action alert” to colleagues or employees

Date Completed

Notes

GOAL 3: Send a letter on behalf of your organization on a SBW issue

Date Completed

Notes

GOAL 4: Help coordinate an Advocacy Network meeting or participate an in-district legislator meeting

Date Completed

Notes

GOAL 5: Other (e.g. testify on a bill, host a State Bar meeting, analyze legislation, etc.)

Date Completed

Notes

Voting information



Find Your Polling Place

www.myvotewi.gov/find-my-polling-place



REGISTER

Register at Your Polling Place

Wisconsin has same-day voter registration at the polls.



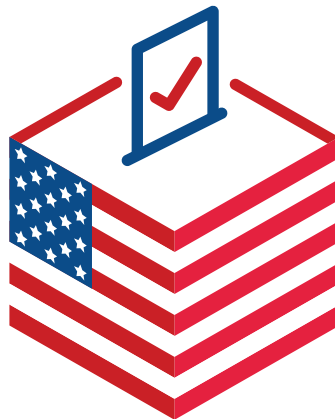
Check Your Registration Status

www.myvotewi.gov/register-to-vote



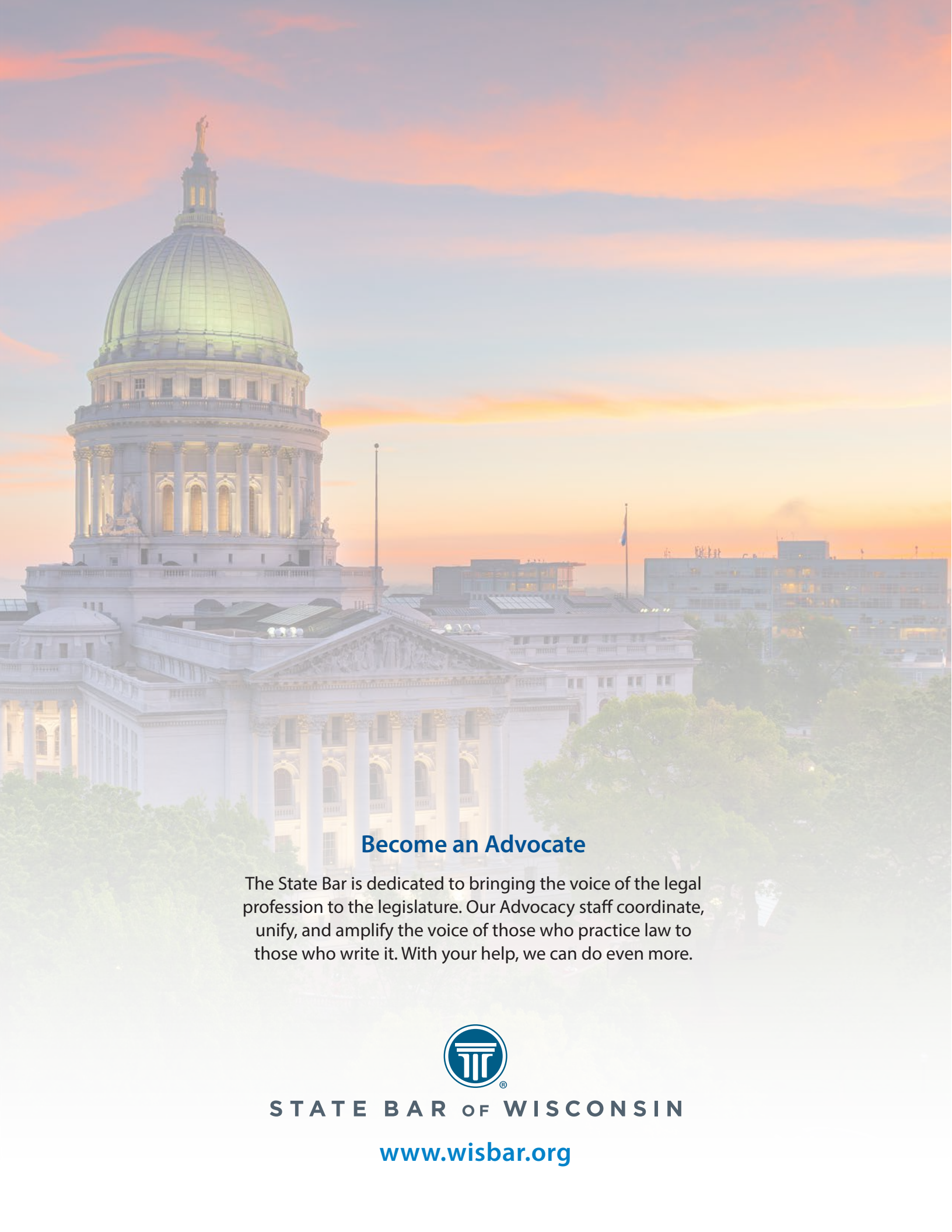
Need to vote absentee?

Anyone who wants to vote absentee in Wisconsin may do so — we are a “no-excuse” absentee voting state. You may cast your absentee ballot by mail, or cast an in-person absentee ballot, also known as early voting.



Get the information you need to vote:

www.myvote.wi.gov



Become an Advocate

The State Bar is dedicated to bringing the voice of the legal profession to the legislature. Our Advocacy staff coordinate, unify, and amplify the voice of those who practice law to those who write it. With your help, we can do even more.



STATE BAR OF WISCONSIN

www.wisbar.org