



State Bar Issues Outstanding as Fall Floor Session Comes to a Close

The few months that remain in the Wisconsin Legislature's 2025-2026 session calendar are expected to be the busiest part of the legislative cycle. This article sums up what was known in early December about the legislature's activities until the session ends and highlights a few items that State Bar of Wisconsin lobbyists are focusing on.

BY CALE BATTLES, LYNNE DAVIS, AND DEVIN MARTIN

As the trees lost their leaves in the fall and the weather shifted to winter, so, too, did the mind-sets of those working in the Wisconsin Capitol. After a limited floor period in September, legislative activity increased significantly throughout October and November, with numerous committee hearings and floor days, completing the fall floor session on Nov. 18 (Senate) and Nov. 19 (Assembly). Now those who work in and around state government are looking ahead to the remaining session days in early 2026.

While the fall floor period closed in November, legislative committees continued to meet right up until the holidays, in a mad dash to ensure bills were in place for the final floor periods of the 2025-2026 legislative session. In January, the legislature will return for the final floor periods sometime between Jan. 13 and 22 and between Feb. 10 and 19.

Additional floor days are also scheduled from Mar. 17 to Mar. 19, but if the past is any indication, the March floor period might be used only for limited action, or one house might meet for a single day to conclude any outstanding business from the other chamber.

While technically there are only a few months left on the 2025-2026 session calendar, this period is expected to be the busiest part of the legislative cycle. A frenzied pace at the end of session is common, but it is anyone's guess what might, or might not, be resolved in these remaining months. Ask almost anyone who works in the Capitol what they expect to happen and the guesses they share – often

prefaced with the caveat that "this could change at any moment" – will vary from how many floor days each chamber will hold to the number of outstanding bills anticipated to pass on those few, or perhaps numerous, floor session days. What everyone can agree on is that there will be intense pressure to keep up with the frantic pace and ensure their favored bills are on the calendar, while those they oppose are left off.

Regardless of how many floor days remain in 2026, the State Bar of Wisconsin's Advocacy

signUp
WWW.WISBAR.ORG/

STAY engaged to help move legislation forward. Learn about the State Bar's Government Relations program, access the Advocacy Network Grassroots Toolkit, and read the monthly e-newsletter, Rotunda Report.

State Bar Advocacy Network
www.wisbar.org/
GovRelations

Rotunda Report
www.wisbar.org/
rotundareport





ROTONDA REPORT

Team hopes to resolve a few outstanding issues in which the Board of Governors policy positions apply.

Criminal Justice System Funding

The first of these matters is an attempt to build on the 43 new assistant district attorney (ADA) positions and 12.5 support positions for the Wisconsin State Public Defenders Office (SPD) that were included in the 2025-2027 budget

(and a corresponding 2.0 court reporters) in 2027-28, and 64.5 ADAs, 22.0 ASPDs, 41.0 SPD support staff, and 4.0 circuit court judges (and a corresponding 4.0 court reporters) in 2028-29. The bill adds four circuit court branches, in Brown County (Aug. 1, 2027), Menominee and Shawano County (Aug. 1, 2027), Brown County (Aug. 1, 2028), and Kenosha County (Aug. 1, 2028). It should be noted that funding for the new positions will

What everyone can agree on is that there will be intense pressure to keep up with the frantic pace and ensure their favored bills are on the calendar, while those they oppose are left off.

compromise¹ reached last July. While the additional positions helped address a growing need in these important criminal justice agencies, legislators have recognized that more needs to be done. In acknowledgement of this, Rep. David Steffen (R-Howard) and Sen. Eric Wimberger (R-Oconto), along with 17 other legislators, introduced Assembly Bill 514² and Senate Bill 546,³ which they declared the “Justice for All Act.”

The legislation provides position authority for 30.5 ADAs, 13.0 assistant state public defenders (ASPDs), 23.0 SPD support staff, and 2.0 circuit court judges

need to be requested in the respective agency budget requests for the 2027-29 biennial budget.

Ensuring proper staffing and support is critical to maintaining the integrity and effectiveness of Wisconsin's criminal justice system. The State Bar's Board of Governors supports the position increases and will continue to advocate for fully funding these positions.

Exoneree Compensation

In addition, a bipartisan proposal, led by Rep. Jessie Rodriguez (R-Oak Creek) and Sen. Van Wanggaard (R-Racine), aims to improve justice for people wrongfully convicted of a crime in Wisconsin with the recent introduction of Assembly Bill 583 / Senate Bill 577.⁴

Over a century ago, Wisconsin became the first state to pass laws to compensate individuals who were wrongfully convicted, but those laws have not been updated in decades. Today, the state's limits on compensation are the lowest of any such statute in the nation.

SB 577/AB 583 would increase the annual and lifetime caps for compensation that exonerees can receive, from \$5,000 per year and \$25,000 per lifetime, to \$50,000 for each year of wrongful imprisonment with a \$1 million cap. In addition, exonerees could be eligible for health insurance for each year imprisoned, with a five-year maximum. Exonerees may also seek transition

assistance from the Department of Corrections and request that records related to the case be sealed. The bill would also create a faster process for hearing and deciding compensation claims, while ensuring that undeserving individuals – such as those who committed related offenses or subsequent serious felonies – do not receive a windfall.

The State Bar's Board of Governors supports Rep. Rodriguez and Sen. Wanggaard's efforts to more justly compensate wrongfully convicted individuals for the time and freedom they lost.

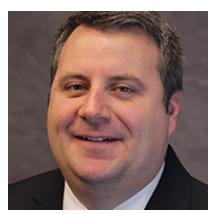
Negotiations Continue to Strike Balance Between Justice System Funding and Access to Justice

While the State Bar's Board of Governors supports the aforementioned bills as introduced, they are also working in tandem with the Advocacy Team to negotiate a reasonable resolution to legislation seeking to increase court fees, public policy that the State Bar opposes in certain circumstances.

Assembly Bill 320⁵ and Senate Bill 333⁶ proposed by Rep. Scott Allen (R-Waukesha) and Sen. Van Wanggaard (R-Racine), would apply an inflationary increase to all statutorily set court fees, based on when the fee was added to a statute or the most recent time the fee was adjusted, and continue to index those fees to inflation in the future. The revenue generated by the increased fees would be directed back to the counties where the fees are collected.

The State Bar testified against the proposal in an Assembly Judiciary Committee public hearing in October, highlighting access to justice concerns for individuals and the impact increased fees might have on participants seeking justice during times of significant emotional or financial distress.

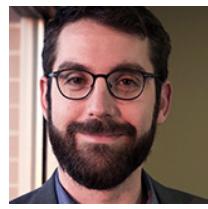
Legislators on the committee were receptive to the State Bar's concerns and the State Bar's lobbyists are working with the bill authors on potential areas of compromise.



BATTLES



DAVIS



MARTIN

Cale Battles is the Government Relations Program manager, **Lynne Davis** is a State Bar lobbyist, and **Devin Martin** is the grassroots coordinator at the State Bar of Wisconsin. Access the digital article at www.wisbar.org/wl.
cbattles@wisbar.org
ldavis@wisbar.org
dmartin@wisbar.org



Finding a Path Forward

In politics, as in life, you gather more flies with honey than with vinegar. This is why the State Bar's Advocacy Team tries to find every opportunity to work with legislators and interest groups, either to support the legislation they craft or to find a mutually acceptable resolution to legislation that may concern State Bar members.

By engaging in good-faith discussions, supporting legislation when appropriate, and serving as a resource for legislators curious about the justice system, the State Bar of Wisconsin will continue to grow in its presence in the Capitol, as well as its influence on public policy.

If you would like to reach out to your legislators and let them know that you, too, are an available and willing resource in their community, we encourage you to use the State Bar's Grassroots Advocacy Network to

introduce yourself to your legislators and share how you may be of assistance to them as they represent their district. To participate, please visit www.wisbar.org/govrelations.

For questions or more information on legislation, please feel free to contact State Bar Lobbyist Lynne Davis or Government Relations Manager Cale Battles. For grassroots advocacy questions, please contact Grassroots Outreach Coordinator Devin Martin. To

stay up to date on budget news, please subscribe to the Rotunda Report and follow us on X to stay informed and get involved in the legislative process. **WL**

ENDNOTES

¹Cale Battles & Lynne Davis, *Governor and Legislative Leaders Reach Compromise, Pass Budget*, Rotunda Report (July 14, 2025).

²Assembly Bill 514, Wis. State Leg. (2025-2026), <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2025/proposals/ab514>.

³Senate Bill 546, Wis. State. Leg. (2025-2026), <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2025/proposals/sb546>.

⁴Assembly Bill 583, Wis. State Leg. (2025-2026), <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2025/proposals/ab583>; Senate Bill 577, Wis. State Leg. (2025-2026), <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2025/proposals/sb577>.

⁵Assembly Bill 320, Wis. State Leg. (2025), <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2025/related/proposals/ab320>.

⁶Senate Bill 333, Wis. State Leg. (2025), <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2025/related/proposals/sb333>. **WL**

Motor Vehicle Crashworthiness

Since we opened our doors in 1979, Murphy & Prachthauser has been an advocate for safer products and practices. We have been nationally recognized for successfully litigating cases against corporations that design or manufacture defective vehicles, causing serious injuries. Such defects, to name a few, include faulty air bags, car roofs, seat belts, seats, park to reverse, and gas tanks.

In a case involving a defective vehicle, it is crucial that victims work with attorneys who are experienced in vehicle defect and crashworthiness cases. If you have a case involving a vehicle defect, we can work with you to provide mutual benefit to your client.

Please contact attorney

Thadd Llaurado, Michelle Hockers, or Kate Llaurado Scheidt
(414) 271-1011 | murphyprachthauser.com

Murphy & Prachthauser
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

MILWAUKEE | GREENFIELD | WAUKESHA | MEQUON | WEST BEND

