

## Wisconsin State Budget Process Begins

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The Wisconsin state government recently began work on a two-year spending plan that will be enacted into law by July 1, 2017. This spending plan (the State Budget) is much more than an accounting of the state's expected revenues and expenditures. It is the most comprehensive set of public policy initiatives undertaken by the Governor and Legislature, routinely including major shifts in public policy affecting transportation, health care, natural resources, education, agriculture, other highly regulated industries, the tax code, economic development programs, and every industry segment in the state.

The development of the State Budget presents an opportunity for businesses to pursue changes in the law that improve the bottom line and make business more profitable. It also presents an opportunity to proactively manage risk. Engaging in the development of the State Budget can result in:

- Reduced costs of business, avoidance of litigation, and increased opportunities to expand markets through regulatory relief and tax reform;
- Creation of new business opportunities within new or revised state programs;
- Protection of existing business interests through the defeat of potentially harmful proposals; and
- Improved strategic decision-making through access to information impacting the future legal and regulatory environment specific to the business.

Both the Governor and state lawmakers are on the lookout for good ideas that help create jobs and grow the economy, and the State Budget is a great vehicle for enacting new laws to help businesses thrive.

Here is a probable timeline with key decision points in the budget process. Given what is set forth below, now is the time to discuss potential opportunities to shape public policy and to manage business risk.

### **2016**

**September** Every state regulatory agency submits a budget request to the State Budget Office. These requests often are more perfunctory, but shortly thereafter, their budget white papers are due, which include new initiatives that the agency has scoped out in alignment with the Governor's overall priorities. Drafting and vetting of specific proposed law changes ramps up.

**October** The Governor, his advisors and the State Budget Office continue to hold regular meetings to develop initiatives consistent with the Governor's priorities and his

approach to government. Key decisions about all aspects of the budget bill are made during these meetings.

**2017**

- January      Drafting and vetting of specific proposed law changes concludes, the Governor determines the content of the final bill, and the bill is introduced into the Legislature.
- February     The Legislative Fiscal Bureau prepares their analysis of the introduced budget bill. Lobbying of the Legislature and the Joint Committee on Finance ramps up to add, change, or delete sections of the introduced bill.
- March        The Joint Committee on Finance, staffed by the Legislative Fiscal Bureau, begins a series of public hearings on the budget bill.
- May          Public hearings conclude and the Joint Committee on Finance formally begins the process of changing the budget bill to conform to the committee's intentions.
- June         Both houses vote on the budget bill, as changed by the Joint Committee on Finance.
- July          The budget bill becomes law.