

Co-sponsorship of LRB-5710/1, relating to: Establishing the Office of the Public Affairs Network to Replace WisconsinEye

Sen.Spreitzer

Tue 12/16/2025 12:06 PM

To:*Legislative All Senate <ALLSEN@legis.wisconsin.gov>; *Legislative All Assembly <ALLASM@legis.wisconsin.gov>;

Cc:Rep.Brown <Rep.Brown@legis.wisconsin.gov>;

 1 attachments (74 KB)

25-5710_1.pdf;

To: All Legislators

From: Senators Mark Spreitzer, Kelda Roys, and Chris Larson

Representative Brienne Brown

Date: December 16, 2025

RE: Co-sponsorship of LRB-5710/1, relating to: Establishing the Office of the Public Affairs Network to Replace WisconsinEye

SHORT DEADLINE: Friday, December 19, 2025 at 12:00 pm

Wisconsin has a long history of transparent and open government. From our state's first statutes in 1849 to today, public access to government has been recognized as critical to a healthy representative government. With that history and goal in mind, we have authored LRB-5710, which will ensure continuous, nonpartisan public access to Wisconsin state government for the people of our state.

LRB-5710 comes directly from yesterday's shutdown of WisconsinEye. This shutdown has resulted in an immediate and unacceptable loss of access to live coverage and video archives of state government for the public, for journalists, and for legislators. Thanks to this shutdown, the public will not have online access to committee hearings and public meetings happening this week, which they have come to rely upon. This failure underscores a fundamental need: Open government requires reliable and permanent public infrastructure, not a private entity that can be shut down due to difficulties raising funds or in an attempt to pressure legislators to provide funds. Public access should not be dependent on the generosity of donors.

LRB-5710 creates a permanent office to operate a public affairs network that will provide full coverage of state government proceedings in Wisconsin. The Office of the Public Affairs Network will administer a network that must:

1. Provide live coverage of state government proceedings including all legislative floor sessions, all meetings of legislative committees, meetings of executive branch agencies, supreme court and other judicial proceedings, news conferences, and related civic events.
2. Provide access to a permanent digital archive of its coverage.
3. Operate in a strictly nonpartisan manner.
4. Guarantee unrestricted public access without requirements such as online account registration, paywalls, or other burdens to accessing the network's content.

The Office of the Public Affairs Network will be overseen by a board responsible for appointing the Network's Director and ensuring the conditions above are met. The Board shall consist of seven members:

- The Governor or their designee
- Two public members appointed by the Governor
- Four legislators - one from the majority and minority caucuses in both chambers.

The Office will have eight staff positions - including its Director, who is appointed by the Board - and will have an annual appropriation of \$2 million to fund operations equivalent to WisconsinEye's current coverage while supporting increased access. As the new network is launched, we have provided explicit authority for the Office to hire staff who have demonstrated their talent and technical expertise at WisconsinEye. The hardworking technical staff at WisconsinEye are familiar with the many unique challenges of filming and broadcasting events in the State Capitol and around the state, and it is imperative that their unique public access experience is not lost due to a failure of fundraising.

Finally, LRB-5710 directs the Department of Administration to attempt to obtain the complete digital archives of WisconsinEye in order to permanently maintain them as part of the new network's archive. While WisconsinEye's current contract requires them to hand over digital archives to the Wisconsin Historical Society for ongoing public access if WisconsinEye is ever dissolved or liquidated, WisconsinEye's current funding issues have resulted in WisconsinEye taking the archives offline without a replacement becoming available.

The Department of Administration is also authorized to acquire the existing equipment from WisconsinEye if it is in the public interest to do so. We understand that the issues at WisconsinEye which closed public access are those of fundraising and administration, not technical expertise or equipment failure, and there is no reason to start from scratch if other options make sense.

LRB-5710 transforms the recording, broadcasting, and archiving of Wisconsin's state government proceedings from a failed private venture into a reliable, nonpartisan public service. We urge you to join us and cosponsor this legislation to ensure that the transparency and accessibility of state government are permanently secured for all Wisconsin citizens.

To be added as a cosponsor for this legislation, please reply to this email or contact Sen. Spreitzer's office at 608-266-2253 or Rep. Brown's office at 608-237-9143 by December 19 at 12:00pm.