

Testimony on 1997 Assembly Bill 101

Assembly Committee on Government Operations

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Good Morning, Ladies and Gentlemen. My name is Lauri Kranig, Research Assistant to State Representative Rob Kreibich and I would like to provide testimony on Assembly Bill 101 relating to using the drafting privileges of the Legislative Reference Bureau.

First I would like to thank Representative Dobyms and the Committee for holding a hearing on this important piece of taxpayer-friendly legislation. I would like to apologize for Representative Kreibich's absence. He had previous unbreakable commitments in the district today and was unable to be here. However, because of my familiarity with the legislation, I was happy to come and discuss it with the committee.

Late last session, it was brought to our attention that there were certain, specific lobbying groups that had the same rights in drafting legislation as legislators and state agencies. Upon investigating this further we found that only certain cities, counties, and school boards are able to go directly to the drafters and request legislation. The others must either go through their representative or senator or contact the group they belong to. In addition, lobbying groups outside of local governmental bodies are not able to approach drafters at all for legislation.

The practice of allowing drafting by the eleven groups, Alliance of Cities, Association of School Boards, Counties Association, Dane County, League of Municipalities, City of Madison, City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Milwaukee Public Schools, State Bar, and Towns Association, began at a time when legislators were part-time, seldom if ever in Madison. These groups had drafting privileges to make sure that legislation was drafted since the legislators were not readily accessible. With the advent of high-tech telecommunications and full-time legislators and staff, the justification for this practice is gone. We feel it is time to end this practice of favoritism.

In addition, these groups are not allowed to introduce legislation and must ask a legislator to do the introduction for them. Thus, what is the point of having legislation drafted by someone other than a legislator. The legislator that introduces a bill is expected to testify on the legislation at a hearing and oversee its movement through the legislature. It would, perhaps, make more sense to have the member take part in the process from the very beginning so they know the "in's and out's" of the legislation and everything that went into creating it. Ending the practice of allowing drafting privileges to groups would encourage this participation, even require it.

It is possible that some groups will get up and tell you that the number of bills they draft under these privileges doesn't amount to much. In our opinion, one bill is too much. It costs taxpayers additional money to draft these bills that most likely do not serve their communities any good. With a total proposed budget of over \$3 million per year in the next biennium, even 2% would be \$60,000. In addition, these groups with privileges are getting this right FOR FREE. It appears to be a blatant misuse of taxpayer money.

I would also like to add that there are many legislators that these groups can contact. The city of Milwaukee is represented by 23 legislators - 1/6th of the Wisconsin Legislature. The city of Madison is represented by 8 legislators. And the counties of Milwaukee and Dane are even larger. Dane county is represented by 13 legislators and Milwaukee county is represented by 33 legislators, 1/4th of the Wisconsin Legislature.

What we're talking about is the openness of government. As it currently stands, our state government is more open to some than it is to others.

This bill does something important. It makes things fair. Every person in the state has the same access to legislation from the larger cities of Wisconsin to the average constituent on the street.