



The Office of Legislative Services (OLS) is an agency of the New Jersey Legislature established by law to provide professional, nonpartisan staff support services to the Legislature including its officers, members, committees and commissions. The organization, purposes and responsibilities of the agency are set forth in statute N.J.S.A. 52:11-54 et seq.

The OLS operates under the authority of the Legislative Services Commission, a 16-member bipartisan panel with equal representation from each House of the Legislature. The Commission establishes general operating and budgetary policies, appoints the agency's statutory officers, and delegates authority for operations and personnel actions to the Executive Director.

Direct services to legislators and their staff include:

- general, legal, and fiscal research and analysis
- bill drafting
- formulation of legal opinions
- preparation of fiscal notes
- audits of State departments, agencies and programs
- committee staffing
- distribution of bills and legislative documents
- computerized information management
- legislative library and reference services
- administrative and district office services
- human resources program management
- ceremonial resolution drafting
- public information and visitor services
- special assistance as requested

The goal of the OLS is always to facilitate the work of the New Jersey Legislature, and to enable and promote public understanding of the legislative process.

RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

A Key Source of Research and Analysis The OLS is one of the most important sources of legislative research and analysis. While several of the agency's units may be called upon by a legislator to assist with these functions, the chief responsibility resides in the Central Management Unit (CMU).

In drafting and analyzing bills and amendments, the Unit's Central Staff plays an integral role in gathering, comparing and condensing information for use by legislators and committees engaged in the legislative decision-making process. The Central Staff is often called upon to produce impact studies as well. Most research is delivered in the form of confidential memoranda or reports to legislators.

The Central Staff Director's Office establishes and maintains professional standards for legislative bill drafting, research, analysis and committee staffing.

The Central Staff also prepares legislative issues briefs that provide information on specific topics of significance or continuing interest to participants in the legislative process. These reports, referred to as *OLS Backgrounders*, are available to legislators and legislative staff.

Assisting Legislators in Drafting Legislation A significant role of the OLS is assisting legislators in the drafting of legislation. All bills and amendments are drafted and/or reviewed by the Central Staff prior to introduction.

The Central Staff consists of budget and fiscal analysts, researchers, and legal counsel, who are divided into ten subject areas, referred to as sections. Sections include Authorities, Utilities, Transportation and Communications; Commerce, Labor and Industry; Education; Environment, Agriculture, Energy and Natural Resources; Human Services; Judiciary; Law and Public Safety; Local Government; Revenue, Finance and Appropriations; and State Government.

Bill drafting services are available only to legislators and their staff. However, the Central Staff will often work with a private citizen, local official or interest group at the request of a legislator. If directed, the Central Staff also may assist Executive agencies in preparing legislative drafts. Once completed, bill draft text is formatted by the Bill Processing Unit.

By law, the nature and existence of a legislator's bill drafting requests are confidential. The OLS staff will not discuss the request with any other legislator or outside contact, except with the permission of the legislator.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL

Chief Legal Officer The OLS Legislative Counsel is the chief legal officer of the Legislature, and counsel to the Legislative Services Commission, the OLS and the Joint Legislative Committee on Ethical Standards.

The Legislative Counsel is available to advise legislative leadership, members, committees and commissions with respect to parliamentary procedures and legal matters affecting the Legislature.

An Ethics Counsel, appointed by the Executive Director of the OLS, is directed to advise legislators on issues pertaining to the Conflicts of Interest Law and the Legislative Code of Ethics.

The Office of the Legislative Counsel also provides confidential legal opinions, upon request; establishes general standards for the drafting and review of legislation by the OLS; performs law revision and legal editing duties; and processes information requests as cited in the Open Public Records Act.

Budget, Revenue and Fiscal Analysis As the chief fiscal officer for the Legislature, the Legislative Budget and Finance Officer (LBFO) compiles and presents fiscal information to the Legislature; reviews requests for the transfer of funds among State accounts; and evaluates the correctness of claims made against the State that would require appropriations of State funds.

The LBFO also assists the budget and appropriations committees in their review of the Governor's budget proposals; reports on matters as directed by committees or the Legislature; and administers the fiscal note process by which an estimate of the fiscal impact of proposed legislation is prepared. In addition, the LBFO provides staff support to the Joint Budget Oversight Committee.

The LBFO and the OLS Central Staff sections maintain continuous oversight and analysis of the budget and fiscal activity of State departments and agencies. Sections assist legislative committees and the LBFO in reviewing the Governor's proposed budget and Executive requests for legislative appropriations. As a result, Central Staff is often called on to issue special fiscal reports.

In conjunction with the LBFO, the OLS Revenue, Finance and Appropriations Section provides revenue and tax estimates, as well as economic background information, to the appropriations committees for use in evaluating the annual budget.

Financial and Performance Audits The State Auditor is a constitutional officer appointed by the Legislature and placed within the OLS. The Auditor conducts financial and performance audits of State agencies, certain school districts and vicinages of the Judiciary.

COMMITTEE AIDES

Committee Aides The OLS Central Management Unit provides full-time professional staff to assist each standing reference, select and special committee or commission formed by the Legislature. Central Staff sections are responsible for continuous research of topics in their subject areas so that they are prepared to provide legislative committees and commissions with expert staff assistance.

Committee aides are selected on the basis of their expertise in committees' subject areas. In a confidential, nonpartisan manner, they assist all committee members and legislators in analyzing bills; drafting amendments; and providing research and fiscal and legal resources.

Not only a source of professional advice and information, committee aides also maintain records of past committee activities, provide notice of future meetings and agendas, coordinate testimony and provide committee information to the public.

Legislative Information As a unit within the OLS Office of Public Information (OPI), the Legislative Information and Bill Room (LIBR) acts as a clearinghouse of information for the legislative community and the general public.

Responding to Inquiries The LIBR staff respond to inquiries made by phone, mail, e-mail and in person at the LIBR service desk located in the State House Annex. Common questions pertain to legislative action, meeting schedules, contact information and explanations of legislative procedures. When appropriate, staff also refer inquiries to State, local and Federal agencies.

Providing Meeting Notice and Review The LIBR prepares the *New Jersey Legislative Calendar* that details scheduled meetings and agendas for legislative sessions, legislative committees and commissions, and public hearings. The day after each session, the LIBR publishes the *New Jersey Legislative Digest*, a concise summary of legislative action. Both publications are available in hard copy and on the Legislature's web site (www.njleg.state.nj.us).

Document Printing and Distribution The LIBR provides legislators with copies of bills, resolutions, advance laws and chapter laws, State agency reports, the *Senate Journal*, *General Assembly Minutes* and *Laws of New Jersey*. The LIBR also prints and distributes committee statements, fiscal notes, public hearing transcripts and district maps.

Obtaining Publications The OPI produces a variety of publications about legislative subjects and visitor information. Publications are available from Publications and Graphic Services or the LIBR.

Public Hearing Transcripts The Hearing Reporter Unit, within the OPI, records and transcribes public hearings, meetings and proceedings held by legislators, legislative committees and commissions.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Hearing Reporter services are performed upon request from a committee chair or leadership.

Open Public Records Act (OPRA) Some documents, not readily available to the public, may be disclosed through OPRA. The Director of the Office Of Public Information is the OLS Records Custodian for requests submitted through the Open Public Records Act.

Computer Resources The OLS Data Management Unit (DMU) oversees the planning, operation, maintenance, programming and security of the Legislative Information System. The system serves legislative staff within the Capitol Complex, nearby offices and legislative district offices. Users are linked via the Internet, and secure local and area networks.

Support and Training A 24-hour help line and computer training for legislative and district office staff are provided by the DMU. Staff also make service calls to address equipment and operational issues.

Bill Tracking For the convenience of legislators and their staff, the DMU has designed and maintains an electronic bill-tracking system. A printed *Bill Guide* contains information, extracted from the system, that details progress on all bills currently under consideration.

The Legislative Web Site Together, the DMU and the OPI maintain the Legislature's web site (www.njleg.state.nj.us). The site provides an array of documents and material relevant to legislative activity, including members' biographical and contact information. Legislators and their staff may access additional agency resources through the Intranet, a secure area network.

Reference Services The OLS Library, within the Office of Public Information, provides professional research, library and information services to the Legislature, individual legislators and their staff, and legislative committees and commissions. Queries may be made in person, by phone, e-mail or fax.

New Jersey Legislative Materials The Library's special emphasis is on New Jersey legislative materials. Sources include legislative histories; public hearing transcripts; bills dating back to 1937; laws; the *New Jersey Administrative Code* and the *New Jersey Register*; court cases and rules; special and annual reports of New Jersey agencies, task forces and commissions; and Governors' executive orders, veto messages and press releases. The Library also maintains an extensive collection of historical documents relating to the Constitution of New Jersey.

Additional Resources Information from the Federal government and other states is available through the Library's CD-ROM collection, the Internet, Intranet and other online databases. A large collection of reports and analyses from "think tanks," other states, and public policy and research organizations allows for comprehensive research. Subscriptions to over 150 periodicals and journals, and electronic access to hundreds more, allow researchers to view the most current perspectives on issues.

Clipping Service Regional and statewide reporting and commentary from 16 newspapers are collected daily and circulated to the legislative community via e-mail and hard copy. Clipping service material is archived from 1981 to the present by subject and date.

OPERATIONAL OVERSIGHT

Chief Executive Officer The OLS Executive Director is the chief executive officer. In this capacity, the Executive Director supervises operations including employing and placing all personnel, other than officers appointed by the Legislative Services Commission (LSC); and coordinates budgetary matters. The OLS Executive Director also serves as Secretary to the LSC.

The Office of the Executive Director administers the District Office Services Program; reviews office leases on behalf of the presiding officers; and provides staff to the State Leasing and Space Utilization Committee.

Administrative Services The OLS Administrative Unit provides general administrative services, including payroll, purchasing, general fiscal operations, facilities management and photocopying services, to the OLS and, upon request, to the Legislature, its committees and commissions.

District Office Services Program Legislators maintain district offices to conduct business associated with their legislative duties. Office space is leased and furnished under the *Joint Rules Governing Legislative District Offices*. District Office Services arranges for furniture, telephone equipment, services, maintenance and supplies for legislative district offices statewide, in order to provide consistent resources for all facilities.

Personnel The OLS Human Resources Office administers the personnel program for the OLS and certain legislative commissions. Functions include recruitment and training; employee records management; benefits counseling; and the administration of employee programs including salary, temporary disability and unemployment compensation. The Human Resources Office also reviews and maintains the OLS personnel policies.

Constituent Recognition Ceremonial resolutions, commendations and citations are forms by which the Legislature, or individual legislators, honor a person or organization upon a significant occasion or notable achievement.

The Ceremonial Resolutions Unit writers, within the Office of Public Information, write, print and deliver ceremonial resolutions and commendations to the offices of the Senate Majority, Senate Minority and Assembly Clerk. Those offices finalize and deliver the documents to the sponsor.

Commendations, citations and memorial certificates are issued directly by a legislator through his or her district office.

Civic Education Programs One of the goals of the OLS Office of Public Information is to instruct the public about the legislative process and New Jersey government. Through guided tours, publications, special programs, videos and exhibitions, the Office advocates for an engaged and informed citizenry.

The New Jersey Legislature - Your Lawmakers at Work is a 17-minute DVD presentation. Available through the OPI, it is intended to inform the public about the history of the New Jersey Legislature and the many aspects of the legislative process. The program is designed primarily to be used by legislators in public presentations.

VISITOR SERVICES

The State House Tour Program The OLS Office of Public Information is entrusted with the responsibility for conducting public tours of the State House. Each year, over 30,000 visitors pass through State House hallways as they study New Jersey history and governance. Although comprised mainly of school children, visitors include members of the general public, legislative staff, dignitaries and special guests.

Guided tours are conducted Monday through Saturday, excluding State holidays. Legislators and staff may contact the Tour Office directly to arrange tours for their staff and constituents. Walk-in visitors are welcome.

Services for People with Special Needs During the restoration of the Legislative State House and Annex, efforts were made to ensure that the buildings met barrier-free access subcodes. Services are available for visitors with special physical, visual, speech and hearing requirements. Visitors should notify a committee aide or tour reservationist of their special needs in advance to ensure accommodation.

The Public Use Program Selected areas within the Capitol Complex are available to the public for displays and events intended for “civic and educational purposes.” The Public Use Program is part of the State Capitol Joint Management Commission and managed by the OLS Office of Public Information.

Capitol Complex Welcome Center The OLS Office of Public Information oversees the Capitol Complex Welcome Center which features a multi-purpose meeting room, interactive exhibits and other visitor amenities.