

Legislative Path for Domestic Partner Benefits for UW employees

Via the Biennial Budget (note – the following time line is subject to change)

February 13, 2007 (scheduled)

Introduction of the Governor's budget

- The budget process begins with the introduction of the Governor's budget. In his 2005-07 budget proposal, Governor Doyle did include both language authorizing domestic partner benefits for UW faculty and staff as well as funding for the benefits. He has the option of doing the same for the 2007-09 budget, or he could decide to include authorizing language only (no funding) or not including either. He could also include these benefits for all state employees, not just UW employees.
- The Regents included authorization and funding for UW faculty and staff in their 2007-09 budget request. Discussions continue with the Governor and his staff to encourage him to include these provisions in his proposed budget.

February 14, 2007

Budget goes to the Joint Committee on Finance

Late February - May 2007

Legislative Fiscal Bureau Analysis

- The Legislative Fiscal Bureau prepares a detailed analysis of each provision in the budget. An example of the analysis done for the domestic partner benefit provision in the last budget is available at: www.legis.state.wi.us/lfb/2005-07budget/BudgetPapers/281.pdf.
- This analysis may include a list of items that are deemed policy, not fiscal matters. The Senate and Assembly may jointly decide to remove these items from the budget. In previous budget years, domestic partner benefits have been deemed policy.

March 2007

Joint Committee on Finance holds public hearings

- The first step in the Joint Committee on Finance's process is to hold statewide public hearings on the budget. These hearings are generally held in 4-5 spots around the state in addition to a hearing in Madison. The general public can comment on specific provisions in the budget during these hearings.

Mid April – May 2007

Joint Committee on Finance votes on budget

- After the public hearings, the Joint Committee on Finance begins their work on the budget by debating and voting on specific sections of the budget. Generally, the committee takes action on an agency by agency basis. The smaller state agencies are usually dealt with first, leaving the larger ones like the UW System to the end, usually late May.

- During the debate, the Joint Committee on Finance considers each item that the Legislative Fiscal Bureau has prepared a paper for individually. The domestic partner benefit paper would be considered if the provision has not been removed as policy. A majority vote is required to remove the item from the bill. Because each party controls one house of the legislature, the Finance Committee is equally split between democrats and republicans (8 members each). A tie vote (8-8) is considered a failed vote.
- If the domestic partner provision has been removed as policy (or if the Governor does not include the item in his budget), members of the committee can submit their own amendments to the budget after all of the other specific items are considered. It is expected that this provision would be one of those amendments. Again, it would take a majority vote to include the item in the bill.
- After all votes are taken on individual provisions, a final vote on the budget as a whole is taken by the committee.

June 2007

Full Assembly and Senate consider budget separately

- Each house of the Legislature considers the budget as passed by the Joint Committee on Finance. Changes to the budget are primarily generated by the majority party in each house. For example, in the Assembly, the majority Republicans control what amendments are made to the budget and in the Senate, the majority Democrats do the same.
- If the domestic partner benefit provision is not included in the Joint Finance version of the budget, legislators from either majority party could amend the bill to include this provision. Legislators from the minority party can draft amendments to the budget, but they are rarely adopted. Based on past action on this issue, this provision is most likely to be added or maintained in the budget by the Democrat controlled Senate.
- Once each house has adopted their amended budget, then a conference committee made up of members of each house would meet to reconcile the differences between the two versions (assuming the bills are not identical, which is the likely scenario.)

July – August 2007

Conference Committee reconciles budget

- The Senate and Assembly convenes a conference committee to complete negotiations on the budget. The committee is made up of an even amount of members from each party in their respective houses. It is at this point where much of the horse trading takes place and provisions like domestic partner benefits would be negotiated if the provision is not included in both (Assembly and Senate) versions of the budget. The provision would need to be in one version of the budget, however.
- After negotiating all of the differences, the committee would vote on the budget as a final bill and send it to each house for a final vote. This final vote by each house is on the budget that was agreed upon by the committee and is

not amendable. This means that if the domestic partner provision is not included by the conference committee, it can not be added in this final stage. Likewise, if it is added, it can not be taken out.

August 2007

Governor considers the budget and makes vetoes

- Once the Legislature passes the budget, the Governor then considers the bill and makes his veto decisions. He can not write new provisions in to the budget that the Legislature did not include.

Via individual (stand alone) legislation

If domestic partner benefits are not included in the budget for whatever reason, stand alone legislation can be introduced for the Legislature's consideration. Legislation would need to be approved by both houses (Assembly and Senate), and signed into law by the Governor. Unlike the budget bill, which must be passed, no action is required on individual bills.