



# Introduction to Legislative Oversight

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Levin Center for Oversight and Democracy

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# Levin Center for Oversight and Democracy



U.S. Sen. Carl Levin



Pennsylvania Oversight Committee



Wayne State Law School



NCOIL Summer Meeting

- Workshops for Congress, state, international legislatures
- Videos, testimony, webinars, social media
- Research & Reports (50-state analysis, contract oversight, more)
- Conferences, panels & events
- Oversight experts
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CSG West Annual Meeting

# What is Legislative Oversight?

## The “eyes and voice” of the people

“It is the proper duty of a representative body to look diligently into every affair of government and to talk much about what it sees. It is meant to be the eyes and the voice, and to embody the wisdom and will of its constituents.”

-- United States Supreme Court<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Trump v. Mazars USA, LLP, 140 S.Ct. 2019, 2031 (2020), citing United States v. Rumely, 345 U. S. 41, 43 (1953).

# Agenda

- Identifying oversight topics
- Routine vs. In-Depth oversight
- Six avenues of state legislative oversight
- Recommendations

# Origin of Investigation Topics

- Committee jurisdiction
- Leadership concerns
- Scandals, events, news, problems
- Reports
- Constituents
- Whistleblowers, advocacy groups
- Legislator concerns
- Lawsuits
- Agencies
- Personal experience
- Oversight plan, long-term vision



# Examples of Topics

- Pension funds
- Prisons
- Foster care
- Disaster response
- Lobbying disclosures
- Contract mismanagement
- Infrastructure



# Routine, or In-Depth Oversight?

Routine: "cop on the beat"	In-depth: "firefighter"
Program Outcomes	Scandal
Budgetary	Disaster
Contracts	Chronic Problems
Compliance	Escalating Problems
Deter Malfeasance	Long-term Investigation

# Your Superpowers



- Legislator phone calls and emails get returned.
- Legislators can request investigations and reports.
- Legislator questions trigger research, reconsideration, change.
- Oversight can have as much, or more, impact as legislation.



# Phases of an Investigation

1. Fact-Finding
2. Written Product
3. Hearing
4. Follow up



Tutorials: <https://levin-center.org/congressional-lawmakers/online-tutorials/>

# Avenues for State Legislative Oversight

- Analytic Bureaucracies
- Appropriations Process
- Committees
- Administrative Rule Review
- Advice and Consent
- Monitoring Contracts

# Avenues: Routine or In-Depth?

Routine: "cop on the beat"	In-Depth: "firefighter"

- Analytic Bureaucracies
- Appropriations Process
- Committees
- Admin Rule Review
- Advice and Consent
- Monitoring Contracts

# Example: Dam Safety



# Oversight Plan for 2023-24

Topic	Factual Question	Avenue(s)	Routine, or In-Depth?

# Recommendations for Strengthening Oversight

- Joint oversight committee with balanced party membership.
- Bipartisan approach to topics, inquiry, witnesses, questions, etc.
- More follow-up (e.g., hearings) on reports published by analytic bureaucracies.
- Include contract oversight.
- Create oversight plan for your office.
- Be transparent about oversight outcomes: post status and results of investigations.

For additional resources: <https://www.levin-center.org/state-lawmakers/state-oversight-resources/>

# State Oversight Academy

- Resource for state legislative oversight. Part of the Levin Center.
- Launching in late March. Programming announcement coming soon.
- Four Objectives:
  1. Improve legislative oversight across the country.
  2. Promote oversight scholarship.
  3. Translate scholarship & exchange best practices.
  4. Increase visibility & stimulate public discourse.

For additional resources: <https://www.levin-center.org/state-lawmakers/>





# Thank you!

For more information, contact:

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State Oversight Resources: <https://www.levin-center.org/state-lawmakers/state-oversight-resources/>

State Oversight Workshops: <https://www.levin-center.org/state-lawmakers/oversight-workshops/>

