

November 2025

Guidelines for Washington State Legislature Press Credentials

The Legislature is not subject to the Open Public Meetings Act, relying instead on its own rules to govern access to the chambers. Credentialed members of the press corps are allowed in the wings under those rules.

Issuing press credentials is subject to the direction and control of the administrations of the Senate and House. For the 2026 session, the Senate and the House will conduct separate credentialing processes. Both involve completion of an online application.

The Capitol Correspondents Association put together these guidelines to help people navigate that process.

[A link](#) to the “Senate press access request form” can be found on [the Senate home page](#). The House is developing its press pass request form and will make it available online prior to the start of the 2026 session.

I. Press passes provide physical access to the wings of the House and Senate. They might also help you get better seating at some press events. But if you don’t meet these guidelines or receive a formal pass, you can still cover the Legislature. There are ubiquitous broadcasts on TVW, and anyone can watch from the balconies. Lots of the action takes place outside of the chambers anyway. If the wings are the only place to conduct a needed interview, a legislator may bring you in as their guest.

II. We recommend issuing credentials only to professional journalists. This means that reporting or shooting is your primary job, and that job is the source of most of your income. The only exceptions are Murrow Fellows and interns working under programs for journalism students administered by the University of Washington and Washington State University.

III. Professional journalists who work for websites can obtain credentials. In the past, our bylaws allowed only for people working at a daily or weekly newspaper, or an FCC-licensed TV or radio station. But that definition seemed too restrictive after the rise of several online-only publications.

To address this, the association amended its rules in 2009 to allow for providing credentials to professionals who earn most of their living from a journalistic entity that is covered by [the state media shield law](#). That includes news sources whose distribution is Internet-based. However, the correspondent’s sponsoring entity must have been continuously operating as a news organization for a minimum of one year.

The Association recommendations are guided by this principle: The press must be independent from the government and from the political parties, their constituent groups, and the many organizations which have a stake in the Legislature’s proceedings. Blurring that line would raise questions about the motives of everyone in the press corps, and risk having the Legislature revoke or restrict the access we have maintained in the public interest for many years.

IV. A credential-seeker's employer must be a news organization, full stop. We do not support providing credentials to people who work for any publication or information source that is part of a larger non-news organization. The entity must be doing news for the sake of news alone. A labor union's newsletter, a think tank's blog, or a county government's TV channel are examples of entities that would not qualify. An entity founded, funded or affiliated with lobbyists, lobbyist firms or lobbying associations or whose public or private board or advisory group is composed of lobbyists or lobbyist group representatives would also not qualify.

V. The Association will not support the providing of a credential to a person who is or may become engaged in campaigns, lobbying, or the development of public policy. Giving a relatively inconsequential amount of money to some organization probably is not enough to trigger this rule. Anything beyond that probably is.

It is important that a line be established between professional journalism and political or policy work. This is the spirit in which the Legislature has offered access: The press should act as an independent observer and monitor of the proceedings, not an involved party.

This means that we cannot endorse offering credentials to one who is part of, or may become involved with, a party, campaign or lobbying organization. We also can't support providing a credential to folks who do any sort of consulting, advising, writing, or other work, whether paid or unpaid, for a politician, public official, party organization, lobbying shop, etc. The disqualification also is retroactive: If someone is credentialed and then becomes involved in such activities, the Association would recommend the credential be invalidated.

In some cases, professional journalists have crossed back and forth between being a journalist and being involved in political work. Some even have run for office. Since credentials must be renewed with each legislative session, an assessment of a credential-seeker's current or potential political involvement will be undertaken each year – meaning that someone might qualify for a press credential one year, but not the following, depending on their outside activities.

VI. On top of all this, there are conduct rules we must follow. They're pretty intuitive. Here are the highlights:

-- The Legislature requires business attire if you're in the wings. This means a jacket and ties for men, and appropriate dress for women (jackets not required, but no bare shoulders). If in doubt, ask a friend, or just look at what everyone else around the chambers are wearing and copy them.

-- Don't interrupt the proceedings. If you're having a conversation in the wings, keep it down. Don't cross in front of the rostrum while the Legislature is in session.

-- Don't offer any commentary about whether a bill or amendment or motion is good, bad or otherwise from the press table.

-- You're an observer, not a participant. Don't ever cast a vote for a lawmaker. Don't sit in their chairs on the floor, unless someone you're interviewing says it's OK. It looks bad if you applaud (or boo) the

governor, the speaker, the majority leader, and so on. An exception could be an event where a fellow reporter is honored upon their retirement. We are, however, obliged to stand for the presentation of flags, pledge of allegiance and national anthem if we're at the press tables when sessions begin.

VII. You do not have to put up with harassment of any kind.

Legislators, lobbyists and the other officials here are just people, meaning that some of them may behave badly. If you ever feel uncomfortable about how someone is treating you, please come to a member of the permanent press corps and we will make sure it is handled, as discreetly as you wish.

For answers to general questions in the 2025 session, email Jerry Cornfield or Shauna Sowersby of the Capitol Correspondents Association at the following emails:

jcornfield@washingtonstatestandard.com

ssowersby@seattletimes.com