

**STATE OF WISCONSIN**

**Office of the Secretary of State**

**2023-2025 Biennial Report**

Dear Citizens of Wisconsin,

Pursuant to Wisconsin Statute 15.04 (1)(d), I respectfully submit the 2023–2025 Biennial Report of the Office of the Secretary of State.

The Wisconsin Constitution establishes the Office of the Secretary of State and entrusts it with maintaining a fair record of the official acts of the legislative and executive departments and safeguarding the Great Seal of the State of Wisconsin. Through this constitutional and statutory authority, our office authenticates public documents for international use, records official acts of state government, preserves permanent public records, and supports the continuity and integrity of Wisconsin’s governmental operations.

This report provides an overview of our agency’s responsibilities, operations, accomplishments during the biennium, and goals moving forward. It reflects our commitment to modernization, transparency, and service delivery, ensuring that essential government functions are accessible, efficient, and secure.

Over the past biennium, the Office has reduced processing times for Apostilles and Authentications to historic lows, digitized tens of thousands of public records, launched a comprehensive online public records portal, and implemented expanded electronic payment and online service options. These improvements strengthen transparency while meeting the evolving expectations of the public we serve.

In addition, as Chair of the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands, I serve in a fiduciary capacity overseeing the management of the Common School Fund and other state trust assets. The prudent management of these funds supports annual distributions to Wisconsin public schools and the University of Wisconsin System, reinforcing our commitment to long-term stewardship and public benefit.

As we look ahead, our focus remains clear: to continue modernizing operations, enhancing accessibility, strengthening information security, and upholding the constitutional responsibilities entrusted to this office.

Thank you for your continued trust and engagement. It is an honor to serve the people of Wisconsin with integrity, accountability, and a commitment to excellence.

Sincerely,



Sarah Godlewski  
Secretary of State

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## OVERVIEW OF THE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE PROGRAM RESPONSIBILITIES, 2023 – 2025

The Wisconsin Constitution establishes the Office of the Secretary of State as a constitutional executive office and provides for the Great Seal of the State of Wisconsin. The Constitution further requires the Secretary of State to keep a fair record of the official acts of the legislative and executive departments.

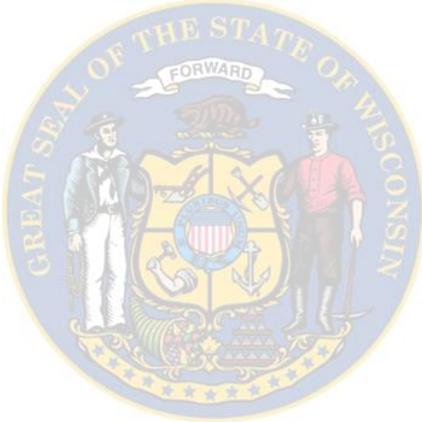
Pursuant to the Wisconsin Statutes, the Secretary of State serves as custodian of the Great Seal and is responsible for affixing it to official state documents. Through this authority, the Office issues Apostilles and Authentications certifying Wisconsin public documents for legal recognition in foreign countries. These services support individuals and businesses engaged in international adoption, global commerce, academic study abroad, and cross-border legal matters. By ensuring documents meet national and international standards, the Office facilitates Wisconsin's participation in the global economy.

The Office of the Secretary of State also responsible for certain government records. Statutory responsibilities include recording official acts of the Legislature and the Governor; filing oaths of office for public officials; recording deeds for state lands and buildings; and preserving permanent public records. Additionally, the Secretary of State must countersign all commissions issued and other official acts done by the governor. These duties ensure continuity of government operations, transparency, and public access to official state actions.

In addition to the constitutional and statutory duties of the Office, the Secretary of State serves as a Commissioner of the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands (BCPL), alongside the State Treasurer and Attorney General. The Secretary currently serves as Chair of the Board and as a member of its Investment Committee. In this fiduciary capacity, the Secretary participates in oversight of the Common School Fund and other state trust assets, which are managed under prudent investor standards. Investment earnings from these trust funds provide annual distributions to Wisconsin public schools and the University of Wisconsin System.

Through interagency collaboration and a continued focus on modernization, the Office is working to improve service delivery, enhance transparency, and expand public access to essential government functions. Efforts to implement online services, electronic payment systems, and modern records management practices are designed to reduce processing times, strengthen accountability, and better serve Wisconsin residents, businesses, and public officials.

**OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE ORGANIZATION CHART**



**Secretary of State  
Sarah Godlewski  
(1.00 FTE)**



**Government Records Division  
Records Forms Management  
Specialist-Advanced  
(1.00 FTE)**

# REVIEW OF AGENCY OPERATIONS AND WORKLOAD 2023–2025 BIENNIUM

During the 2023–2025 biennium, the Office of the Secretary of State continued to fulfill its constitutional and statutory responsibilities despite operating with limited staffing and fiscal resources. The Office remains one of the smallest constitutional offices in state government, yet is responsible for statewide records management, international document authentication, and fiduciary participation on the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands.

## **Workload and Service Demand**

Demand for Apostille and Authentication (A2) services remained strong throughout the biennium. The Office:

- Completed over 15,000 Apostille and Authentication requests in each of the years 2024 and 2025
- Reduced average processing time
- Implemented intake standards to improve accuracy and reduce rework

## **Records Preservation and Public Access**

The Office is statutorily responsible for maintaining and preserving official acts of the Legislature and Governor, oaths of office, and deeds for state lands and buildings as well as other official documents. During the biennium, the Office digitized more than 80,000 historical records and launched a public records portal providing free online access.

The scale of historical backlog and ongoing filing requirements required significant staff time and internal reallocation of duties. Continued digitization, indexing, and long-term digital preservation will require sustained technological infrastructure and staffing support to maintain compliance and ensure continuity.

## **Keep Signatures and Seals**

The Office must receive and file the signature and an impression of the official seal or rubber stamp of all county clerks and register of deeds. Upon request, the secretary of state must certify the authenticity of that signature and official seal or rubber stamp.

## **Technology and Systems**

Modernization efforts included launching an online order system, implementing electronic payment processing, and establishing foundational customer tracking systems. These improvements

reduced reliance on paper-based processes and improved turnaround times.

However, ongoing maintenance, cybersecurity protections, and system enhancements depend on shared services and limited internal capacity. Sustaining modernization gains will require continued coordination with enterprise IT partners and appropriate investment in secure digital infrastructure.

## **Staffing and Operational Capacity**

The Office operates with a small staff relative to its statewide constitutional and statutory responsibilities. Over time, reductions in staffing and budget authority have required the Office to prioritize core functions and delay or phase implementation of certain modernization initiatives.

While operational efficiencies have improved service delivery, the Office's limited staffing model presents challenges in managing workload surges, responding to emergencies, and advancing long-term system improvements. Maintaining current service levels and transparency initiatives will depend on stable and sufficient staffing resources.

## **Flexible Work Schedules**

The Secretary of State's Office has demonstrated strong success in developing and implementing flexible-time work schedules, additional permanent part-time opportunities, and alternative work patterns in accordance with s. 230.215(4), Wisconsin Statutes. Through the establishment of clear policies and streamlined processes, employees are able to adopt flexible arrangements that align with both operational needs and individual circumstances. These efforts have enhanced employee satisfaction, improved work-life balance, and supported workforce retention, while maintaining productivity and service delivery. The Secretary of State office continues to evaluate and refine these practices to ensure they remain responsive, equitable, and effective.

## **Outlook**

The Office remains committed to efficient service delivery, transparency, and responsible stewardship of public records and trust assets. However, continued growth in service demand, increasing cybersecurity requirements, and statutory obligations will require careful resource management and sustained operational support to ensure uninterrupted fulfillment of constitutional duties.

# REVIEW OF 2023 - 2025 BIENNIUM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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The Office of the Secretary of State has worked diligently to modernize operations, improve service delivery, enhance transparency, and strengthen civic engagement across Wisconsin.

## **Modernization and Online Services:**

With a focus on improving customer experience and operational efficiency, the office launched a new online order system and began accepting electronic payments, including credit cards and Apple Pay. A new universal Apostille certificate was implemented to streamline international document authentication. These improvements marked a significant step toward building a modern, accessible service platform for Wisconsinites.

## **Reduced Apostille & Authentication Processing Time:**

Through process improvements, intake standardization, and workflow management, the office reduced processing times from more than one month to less than one week. In 2023, the office completed a record-breaking Apostille and Authentication cases, ensuring individuals and businesses received timely service for international document needs.

## **Public Records Digitization and Transparency:**

The office digitized over 80,000 historical records and launched a new public records portal, providing free and accessible online access to official state documents. Processes were also established to scan and upload new filings as they are received, ensuring ongoing transparency and accountability.

## **Financial System Improvements:**

The office updated financial tracking systems and implemented secure electronic payment processing to ensure accurate accounting, improved customer convenience, and strengthened internal controls.

## **Civic Engagement and Workforce Development:**

To strengthen democracy and support the future public workforce, the office expanded K–12 civic engagement programming and hosted civics activities in schools across Wisconsin. Additionally, the office partnered with municipalities and higher education institutions to promote Federal Work Study opportunities in local government offices, helping connect students to careers in public service.

## PROJECTED GOALS AND CHANGES FOR 2026 - 2028 BIENNIUM

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Managing workload demands across the Office's areas of responsibility, while expanding capacity through technology, will remain an ongoing challenge. The Office will work to meet these demands within existing staffing and budget constraints by continuing to cross-train employees and maintaining a strong partnership with the Division of Enterprise Technology within the Department of Administration to optimize system efficiency.

The Office remains committed to delivering prompt, courteous, and professional service across all channels, including in person, by phone, by mail, and electronically. This commitment will be supported by staying current with trends in information management and pursuing innovative approaches to enhance delivery service.

All forms and applications are currently available online; however, ongoing updates and enhancements will be necessary to ensure usability and accessibility. These improvements will be incorporated into the Office's broader modernization efforts, alongside continued exploration and integration of new technologies to maximize the effective use of available resources.

The Office ensures the accurate and timely authentication of notarial and public official signatures through a well-maintained system of apostilles and certifications. By upholding standards established by the Hague Convention, it maintains comprehensive records, tracks eligible countries, and ensures compliance with international requirements.

The Office is also committed to preserving important state records and expanding public access through modern technology, improving both efficiency and ease of accessing information.

In addition, it supports legislative transparency by promptly notifying agencies of new resolutions and constitutional amendments, maintaining accurate records of legislative actions, and compiling official acts into bound volumes for long-term preservation.

The Office and its staff will work to optimize our new online portal into a streamlined, user-friendly hub for apostille and authentication requests, verifications, open records requests, scheduling, press inquiries, and public records searches. By simplifying workflows and improving navigation, we aim to make each process clear, efficient, and accessible. This optimization will also enhance internal operations by standardizing request intake and reducing manual work, allowing staff to respond more quickly and consistently. Through ongoing improvements, user feedback, and a focus on reliability and accessibility, the portal will strengthen transparency, efficiency, and overall public trust.

## APPENDIX – APOSTILLES/AUTHENTICATIONS BY MONTH/YEAR

<b>Month</b>	<b>FY 22</b>	<b>FY 23</b>	<b>FY 24</b>	<b>FY 25</b>
July	1122	1091	1369	1777
August	1110	1368	1453	1178
September	824	1163	1235	1333
October	475	1061	1457	1386
November	782	1125	1329	954
December	1164	1220	1040	1133
January	1072	733	1120	1217
February	2206	1027	1231	1855
March	1048	1072	1428	1815
April	1116	1716	1313	883
May	1270	1757	1227	845
June	1072	1363	1383	1045
<b>Total</b>	<b>13261</b>	<b>14696</b>	<b>15585</b>	<b>15421</b>

\* Due to recent updates to our office technology and the transition to a new portal, some of these figures may vary slightly.