



CENTER FOR SECURE AND MODERN ELECTIONS



League of Women Voters WISCONSIN



Wisconsin Conservation Voices

March 18, 2020

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State of Wisconsin
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Dear Governor Evers, Members of the Wisconsin State Legislature, and Wisconsin Elections Commissioners,

As Wisconsin's Governor, Legislative Leadership, and Election Commissioners, we appreciate your leadership in addressing the challenges posed by COVID-19 and we are writing to ask that you consider the following steps to increase opportunities for absentee voting during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to ensure that all Wisconsin citizens are able to participate in upcoming elections.

As detailed by the Centers for Disease Control, COVID-19 presents significant risks to vulnerable populations within Wisconsin {[CDC - High Risk](#)}. These populations include individuals who are older, those with underlying health conditions, and those with weakened immune systems. Of equal concern is that those who are not in high risk populations appear to easily transmit the virus to others, often even before they show any symptoms. The rapid spread of COVID-19 across Wisconsin, and the nation, has already led to sweeping restrictions on large gatherings {[Gov. Evers orders ban of gatherings of 10 or more](#)}, requests that people practice social distancing, closure of numerous facilities – including some used as voting and early voting sites - and changes to election procedures in nursing homes and living care facilities. Given these changes, it is important to ensure elections are run with fairness, ease, and accessibility.

We recognize the grave circumstances facing our state, and fully appreciate the work state and local officials have undertaken to protect the public from this pandemic. As state officials respond to protect the health and safety of Wisconsin residents, they must also preserve our democratic systems. We propose a number of steps we strongly urge Wisconsin officials to consider so that the election on April 7, 2020 occurs without undue risk to public health -- or the disenfranchisement of any eligible Wisconsinite, including particularly those voters who have long faced barriers to the ballot, including African Americans, low-income voters, voters with disabilities, and students.

Therefore, we urge your office to take immediate action so that thousands, or tens of thousands, of voters are not disenfranchised during Wisconsin's April 7, 2020 primary election due to the current public health crisis.

We ask that you consider taking the following steps:

1. Mail-in ballot options should be made available to all registered voters (not just those on absentee voter lists). **All voters should be mailed absentee ballots and provided with a list of options to cast their completed ballots (including pre-paid postage for mail return).**
 - a. Shift emergency funds and staff to support the clerks' offices in these efforts.
 - b. In addition, put funding behind a public information campaign to inform voters of the availability of absentee voting and any changes to the process.
2. **Extend the deadline for online registration to Thursday, April 2nd.** While online registration for the April 7th election is slated to end today, we ask that you extend the deadline to April 2nd, to account for the large number of eligible voters who may find they are unable to register in-person at their local clerk's office or on election day due to illness and/or compliance with social distancing guidelines.

3. **Allow mail registration forms to be returned to clerks by email as well as mail, and extend the deadline for emailed forms to Thursday, April 2.** This will allow eligible voters who lack Wisconsin driver's licenses or ID cards – including those with military and VA ID – more time to register. In addition, allowing electronic return of forms and proof of residence documents will ensure that the many voters who do not have printers at home can provide the necessary registration forms and documents without having to go into the public sphere.
4. **Permit municipalities to begin counting absentee ballots as they come in.** Due to an anticipated high volume of absentee ballots, permit municipalities to begin counting absentee ballots as they arrive. This will help our election officials manage the high volume of work awaiting them on election day.
5. **Extend the absentee ballot request deadline to 3 p.m. on Election Day.** Ballots would be required to be postmarked by election day and received within 10 days of election day.
6. **Allow any voter or their designated agent to drop off their absentee ballot at any polling location within their municipality.** Options for requesting, receiving, and returning absentee ballots should be expanded to include drop boxes.
7. **Waive the requirement to have a witness sign an absentee ballot**
 - a. The requirement to have a witness sign an absentee ballot should be waived. Voters may need to self-quarantine, or otherwise not have access to another person in the home.
 - b. Allow voters to cure missing signatures or other errors on absentee ballots, if there is a need to do so within 10 days following the election.
8. **Ensure that absentee voters are given an opportunity to correct inadvertent mistakes or omissions on their absentee ballot envelopes to ensure that the most voters have their votes counted.**
9. **Allow electronic/digital student IDs to be used for requesting an absentee ballot.**
 - a. Students have been asked to leave campus for the semester and thus are unable to receive voter-identification from a physical office on campus. Allow students to use a digital voter identification to prove their identity.
10. **Treat voters who are requesting to be mailed an absentee ballot due to COVID-19 as “indefinitely confined.”** Under Wis. Stat. 6.86(2)(a), “[a]n elector who is indefinitely confined because of age, physical illness or infirmity or is disabled for an indefinite period may by signing a statement to that effect require that an absentee ballot be sent to the elector automatically for every election.” Note that this law does not contain a requirement – express or implied - that the voter must have contracted an illness to fit within this category. Voters who are ill due to COVID-19, as well as those who are following emergency orders and CDC recommendations to practice social distancing by

staying home *are* confined because of a widespread contagious physical illness, and at this point that confinement is for an indefinite period.

11. Commit to keep MyVote and the contingency website, Get To The Polls, updated in real time (or within 3 hours) with any polling place changes.

Earlier this week, more than 200 civil rights organizations -- including a number here in Wisconsin -- signed onto a letter (attached) asking federal and state officials, across the country, to adopt and fund measures to ensure the orderly administration of the 2020 primary and general elections. We stand at the ready to assist in any way we can.

Respectfully,

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