

State of Wisconsin \ Government Accountability Board

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DATE: July 31, 2012

TO: Wisconsin Municipal Clerks
City of Milwaukee Election Commission
Wisconsin County Clerks
Milwaukee County Election Commission

FROM: Nathaniel E. Robinson
Elections Division Administrator
Government Accountability Board

SUBJECT: Announcement of \$1.9 million Grant to Online Absentee Balloting System for Military and Overseas Voters

The Government Accountability Board is proud to announce its receipt of a \$1.9 million grant to create an online absentee balloting system for military and overseas electors. In July 2011, members of the Government Accountability Board authorized staff to respond to a grant solicitation and apply for a grant from the DOD/FVAP that would significantly assist Wisconsin's Local Election Officials to comply with 2011 Wisconsin Act 45, and the Federal Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act of 2009. The grant was developed and submitted.

The goal of the grant is to develop an Online Absentee Ballot Delivery System for UOCAVA (Military and Overseas) Voters. The intent is for the system to be integrated with existing voter look-up, Click and Mail "online registration", and ballot tracking tools to offer UOCAVA electors a simple, straight-forward experience, while also being cost-effective. The online absentee ballot delivery system would allow UOCAVA electors to access an online ballot immediately without having to wait for a reply or email from an election official. Municipal clerks have told the G.A.B. that they are overly busy, that at least 62% are part-time and hold down another job, and only offer limited clerk office hours.

The online ballot delivery system will take the contest and candidate information already entered into the Statewide Voter Registration System (SVRS) and create an online ballot for military and overseas voters. The military and overseas voters will be able to request an absentee ballot and if ballots are available, access and vote their absentee ballot immediately. If absentee ballots are not available, the military or overseas voter will receive an email from the system when the ballots are available and they will be able to access the online ballot. This will lessen and eventually eliminate the need for municipal clerks to scan in ballots and email them to military and overseas electors.

The system will email notifications to municipal clerks and their providers when a military and overseas voter accesses the system. Military voters will be able to request an absentee ballot and access their absentee ballot all in one step and in one location. Overseas voters will have to register by mail, but after registration can request an absentee ballot and access their ballot online. The military and overseas voters are still required to mail their completed absentee ballot back to their municipal clerk. Instructions with municipal clerk information and the absentee certificate will also be provided to the military and overseas electors.

The informal news initially received was that Wisconsin's proposal would likely not be funded. In January 2012, we received notice that our grant proposal may be funded and if so, at a significantly

reduced amount. In February 2012 – and by this time all G.A.B. staff were focused on the 2012 Recall initiative -- we received word that our application would be funded but at about \$500,000 less than what was originally requested. After some intense negotiation, in March 2012, the DOD/FVAP agreed to fund the Online Ballot Delivery System for UOCAVA (Military and Overseas Voters) proposal at its original requested level of \$1.9 million dollars.

The new online absentee ballot delivery system will be in use for the 2012 November General Election. The G.A.B. has scheduled to launch the system when ballots are prepared for the General Election, September 20, 2012.

Municipal Clerk Tasks

Municipal clerks will be asked to continue performing basic established routine election administration tasks to ensure that the new online ballot delivery system functions properly.

- Enter all contests and candidates in SVRS as soon as candidates are certified. This is something we already ask municipal clerks and providers to do, but it is more critical with the new FVAP system as the absentee ballots in the FVAP system will be generated from SVRS. Please make sure to include instructions such as “Vote for No More than One” or “Vote for Three” so military and overseas voters have the same instructions as other absentee voters. Reliers will depend on their providers to enter this information but reliers need to make sure their provider has any municipal contest and candidate information.
- Generate absentee ballot styles and check milestone #4 no later than the 48 days before federal elections and no later than 22 days before all other elections. This is also something that we already request from municipal clerks and providers. Military and overseas voters will not be able to access their absentee ballots online until ballot styles are generated and milestone #4 is checked in SVRS. Reliers will depend on their providers to complete this task but can check on the Voter Public Access (VPA) website to ensure that their Provider has completed this task. The sample ballot on VPA for your municipality will be viewable once ballot styles and milestone #4 are checked.
- Check your email regularly and review emails sent from the FVAP system. The FVAP system will email municipal clerks and their provider, if applicable, when a military or overseas voter requests an absentee ballot and/or receives an absentee ballot online. Clerks will need to regularly check their email to review absentee requests generated by the FVAP system in their municipality and a voter may still request to receive an absentee ballot by mail or fax. Clerk will have to follow-up with those requests.
- Encourage military and overseas voters in your municipality to use the FVAP system to access their absentee ballots. We will work with clerks to contact currently registered military and overseas voters and provide them information on the new system. Additionally, when you receive requests from new military and overseas voters we would like your help in directing them to the new FVAP system when it is ready.

Education, Training, Technical Assistance and Outreach Services

G.A.B. staff will provide education, training, technical assistance and outreach services on how to access and use the Online Absentee Ballot Delivery System for UOCAVA (Military and Overseas) Voters in early September.

A user session will be conducted to gather feedback on the system from municipal clerks. If you would like to be considered as a participant for the user session, please send an email with your contact information to GABMove@wi.gov.

Contact Information

For questions, please contact the G.A.B. Help Desk at (608) 261-2028, or gabhelpdesk@wi.gov, or Katie Mueller. Katie may be reached at (608) 267-7890, or Katie.Mueller@wi.gov. Thank you.

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