

State of Wisconsin \ Government Accountability Board

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JUDGE GERALD C. NICHOL
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Director and General Counsel

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 16, 2015

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

FROM: Michael Haas
Elections Division Administrator

SUBJECT: G.A.B. Budget Proposal and Upcoming Budget Hearings

This memorandum and the attached letter to the Joint Committee on Finance summarizes the Government Accountability Board's feedback and concerns related to the budget proposal for the 2015-2017 fiscal biennium which was offered by the Governor and is being considered by the Legislature. We encourage you to review the attached correspondence, and contact members of the Joint Finance Committee and your local state legislators so that they may directly receive input regarding the impact which local election officials expect the proposed budget to have on their ability to effectively administer elections. In particular, we would note the following points:

1. The Governor's budget proposal extends the position authorization of 22 federally-funded G.A.B. staff until mid-2017, which is when we expect our federal funds to be completely expended. These positions include all of the Elections Specialists, SVRS Specialists, and Help Desk staff who you work with regularly, and who provide all of the training and support to local election officials. We appreciate the extension of these positions, and have pointed out that a more permanent funding source will need to be identified in the subsequent two-year budget.
2. The budget proposal would transfer the G.A.B.'s authority and ability to perform administrative services to the Department of Administration (DOA) as part of a Shared Agency Services Pilot Program, eliminating two positions from our administrative staff. The attached correspondence outlines our concerns regarding this proposal, including the fact that the two positions which are proposed to be eliminated complete many program tasks which DOA is not prepared to perform.
3. Under the budget proposal, DOA's Division of Enterprise Technology (DET) would also take over the IT assets and functions that are now performed by G.A.B. staff and our IT team. As illustrated by recent projects such as the felon voter audit, Badger Voters, and MyVote Wisconsin, technology solutions are critical to our ability to administer election laws and to assist and communicate with local election officials. This is especially true as we

work to complete the modernization of SVRS by the end of this year. The G.A.B. previously relied on DET for IT development and maintenance, and our current IT team model is far more efficient and productive than that experience proved to be.

4. Last year, legislation was enacted to specifically authorize the G.A.B. to conduct the Four-Year Maintenance on behalf of local election officials, but no funding was provided to the agency for the cost of mailing notices to individuals who had not voted in the past four years. The Governor's budget proposal did not include the G.A.B.'s request to provide funding for the mailing, which costs nearly \$100,000. We have asked the Joint Finance Committee to provide the funding to permit the G.A.B. to send the mailing after the 2016 General Election. As an alternative we have suggested that the Legislature authorize the G.A.B. to recoup the cost of the mailing from municipalities.

In a departure from previous budgets, the G.A.B. will not have an opportunity to discuss its budget proposal at a public hearing of the Joint Committee on Finance. G.A.B. staff and Board members are meeting with members of the Committee to outline our concerns regarding the proposed budget. The Committee will be holding four public hearings in the next two weeks at the following locations and times:

Wednesday, March 18 10:00 a.m.	Brillion High School Endries Performing Arts Center
Friday, March 20 10:00 a.m.	Alverno College Pitman Theatre
Monday, March 23 10:00 a.m.	University of Wisconsin – Barron County Fine Arts Theatre
Thursday, March 26 9:30 a.m.	Reedsburg High School CAL Center Auditorium

The proposed budget provisions outlined above will negatively impact the ability of the G.A.B. to complete its own statutory responsibilities and to support local election officials in their own duties. We encourage you to communicate with members of the Joint Finance Committee and your own legislators about the proposed budget as well. If you are able to attend a hearing in your vicinity, it is an excellent opportunity to speak directly to Committee members. However, we realize it is a lot to ask busy clerks to attend public hearings which may last most of the day and involve testimony regarding a variety of state agencies and operations. If you are not able to attend a public hearing, you may certainly provide your input in writing. Attached is a list of members of the Joint Finance Committee and their contact information.

Thank you for your interest in the continuing effectiveness of the Government Accountability Board, and your support as partners in administering elections. If you have any questions regarding this communication, please feel free to contact me at michael.haas@wi.gov or (608) 266-0136.