

State of Wisconsin\Government Accountability Board

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MEMORANDUM

TO: All County Clerks and the Milwaukee County Election Commission
All Municipal Clerks and the Milwaukee City Election Commission
Voting Equipment Programmers and Ballot Printers

FROM: Michael Haas
Elections Division Administrator
Government Accountability Board

DATE: November 21, 2014

SUBJECT: Ballot Format for 2015 Spring Primary

Background

In the spring of 2014, Government Accountability Board (G.A.B.) staff began to revise ballot format based on complaints by voters that ballots were “hard to understand” and “difficult to navigate.” Staff researched best practices and publications based on usability testing to compose simple instructions and to provide for cleaner-looking, less cluttered ballots, and also incorporated informal feedback from local election officials. This effort was intended to improve consistency among ballot designs throughout the State while accommodating features and flexibility requested by printers and equipment vendors.

For the 2015 Spring Primary ballots, G.A.B. staff is continuing this process by initiating a more formal process to seek input from clerks and interested parties before finalizing a recommended ballot format. Staff will present the draft ballots to the Board for approval at its meeting on December 16, 2014, before posting them as samples ballots to be used.

Key Considerations in Ballot Design

The draft ballots incorporate the requirements set out in Wis. Stat. §§5.51-5.56 and 7.08(1)(a). These include: Ballot title (Official Ballot...), Notice to Voters, instructions for multi-candidate elections (Vote for 1, Vote for not more than...), and an endorsement section which includes a space to identify ballots required to be remade.

Left-Justified Text: Except for major titles which are centered, all text is left justified. This is based upon recommended practices in graphic design because text is read from left to right, not from the center out. Centered type forces the eye to hunt for the beginning of the next line. Flush left or “asymmetrical” alignment is simple and highly legible.

Font and Case: All text uses a **sans serif font** and is in sentence case. A **sans serif font** is plain, without the ornamental line attached to the end of a stroke in a letter or symbol as found in **serif fonts**, like the one used in this memo. Lower case letters make easier-to-recognize shapes than capital letters.

Instructions and Navigation: The instructions are plainly stated, provide examples of a properly filled in oval or completed arrow and inform the voter who to contact if he or she has questions. Navigational cues appear at the end of the last column and at the bottom of the ballot itself.

Shading: There are two types of shading: Reverse shading (white on black) to indicate the type of office and light grey to set off the offices. A line separates the office title from the candidates.

Lines vs. no lines between candidate names: There are pros and cons related to placing lines between candidate names, and differing opinions about their usefulness. Lines can give a “busy” or “cluttered” feel to the ballot and are not generally recommended as a best practice. But lines between names can serve as a guide to a voter with compromised vision if the oval or arrow is some distance from the candidate’s name. In a general election where candidates and their party affiliations are both listed, lines can provide definition between one candidate and party and the next candidate and party.

Due to the limitations of the software used to prepare the draft ballots, ovals/arrows may not line up vertically and may not appear flush with the candidate names. When printed as an actual ballot, ovals/arrows must be positioned in line with candidate names.

Solicitation of Suggestion and Comments

The presentation to the Board will include any comments and suggestions received from clerks, ballot printers and other interested parties. Four draft 2015 Spring Primary ballots are attached to this communication. The draft samples are for towns with unnumbered seats. There are two “oval” style ballots and two “arrow” style ballots. Within each style, there are examples of ballots with and without lines between candidate names. **These draft ballots are presented for your input only and are not to be used to produce ballots until they have been reviewed by the Board.**

Please examine these draft ballots and offer your comments, suggestions and preferences by email to gabpubliccomment@wi.gov by December 1, 2014. Thank you for your input.

If you have questions, please contact the Diane Lowe at 608-266-3276 or diane.lowe@wisconsin.gov.

MH/dl

Attach. (4)