

WISCONSIN ELECTIONS COMMISSION

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March 15, 2017

The Honorable Robin Vos
Assembly Speaker
Room 211 West, State Capitol

The Honorable Scott Fitzgerald
Senate Majority Leader
Room 211 South, State Capitol

The Honorable John Nygren, Assembly Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Finance
Room 309 East, State Capitol

The Honorable Alberta Darling, Senate Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Finance
Room 317 East, State Capitol

The Honorable Dale Kooyenga, Vice Chair
Joint Committee on Finance
Room 324 East, State Capitol

The Honorable Luther Olsen, Vice-Chair
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The Honorable Sheila Harsdorf
Room 122 South, State Capitol

The Honorable Mary Felzkowski
Room 306 East, State Capitol

The Honorable Howard Marklein
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The Honorable Mark Born
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The Honorable Thomas Tiffany
Room 409 South, State Capitol

The Honorable Mike Rohrkaste
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The Honorable Leah Vukmir
Room 415 South, State Capitol

The Honorable Gordon Hintz
Room 109 North, State Capitol

The Honorable Lena Taylor
Room 5 South, State Capitol

The Honorable Katrina Shankland
Room 304 West, State Capitol

The Honorable John Erpenbach
Room 7 South, State Capitol

Dear Speaker Vos, Majority Leader Fitzgerald, and Members of the Joint Committee on Finance:

As members of the Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC), we are contacting you regarding the Legislature's consideration of the 2017-19 Executive Budget.

We greatly appreciate that the Governor's budget proposal includes GPR funding to replace most of the federal funds which have supported the State's election agency operations and staffing since 2004. As you are aware, Congress allocated funds to the states through the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) to assist municipalities in the purchase of modern voting equipment, improve the administration of elections, and create an electronic voter registration database. Our current projections indicate that the federal funds will be spent by or around the beginning of fiscal year 2019, although some revenue will continue to be generated from the sale of voter registration data pursuant to Wisconsin Statutes and the Administrative Code. Congress previously has made it clear that the states should not expect additional federal funding for election administration beyond that authorized by HAVA.

By replacing most of the HAVA funds with GPR funding, the Executive Budget establishes long-term resources necessary to administer clean and fair elections and to complete the increasing tasks assigned to the WEC under state and federal laws. The GPR funding will establish a more permanent and stable foundation for the agency's staffing and program responsibilities. The Executive Budget fully replaces the federal funds necessary to continue the agency's IT team, purchase software assurance licenses for the voter registration system, and the costs of important agency programs such as the Four-Year Voter Maintenance process and conducting polling place accessibility audits.

Due to its uniquely decentralized system of election administration, in which municipalities conduct elections rather than counties as in most other states, Wisconsin has used HAVA funds to support most of the staffing for the elections agency -- first the State Elections Board, then the Government Accountability Board's Elections Division, and currently the Wisconsin Elections Commission. Of the WEC's current 31.75 FTE positions, 22 are supported by HAVA funds. In the current 2015-17 budget, the authorized federal positions were reduced from 26 to 22. The 2017-19 Executive Budget proposes a further reduction of six positions.

The WEC unanimously approved the agency's budget request which proposed continuing the 22 federally-funded positions with GPR funding after the HAVA funds expire. We believe that this approach is necessary for the agency to complete the core tasks assigned to it by federal and state statutes, which include comprehensive and continuous training and technical support of local election officials, maintaining and improving the voter registration system, assisting candidates in filing ballot access documents, and providing information regarding voting laws and procedures to the public. A further reduction in program positions will significantly curtail the agency's ability to provide vital and timely services to candidates, county and municipal election officials, and voters.

The responsibilities assigned to the WEC by the Legislature continue to increase. As members of the WEC, we wanted to advise you that we have instructed agency staff to continue to advocate for retaining the additional six positions with the Joint Committee on Finance and the Legislature during its budget deliberations. We look forward to working with the Legislature and the Administration to ensure that the WEC can continue to deliver excellent election administration services in partnership with local election officials in a cost-effective manner on behalf of Wisconsin residents and taxpayers. We also request that the WEC be given an opportunity to participate in its agency briefing before the Joint Committee on Finance.

Thank you again for your consideration of our agency's budget request. If you or your office has any questions regarding this matter or wish to discuss it further, please contact Commission Chair Mark Thomsen at 414-412-6653, or Commission Administrator Michael Haas at 608-266-0136 or Michael.haas@wi.gov.

Sincerely,

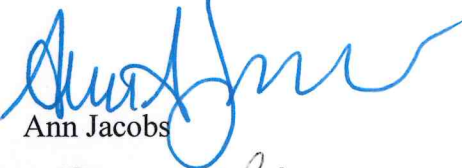
WISCONSIN ELECTIONS COMMISSIONERS



Mark Thomsen, Chair



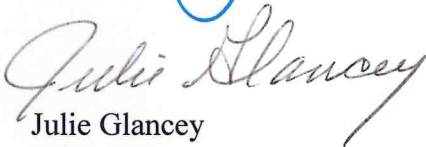
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