

# Wisconsin Elections Commission

## State of Wisconsin

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## **Wisconsin Elections Commission Sends Budget Letters to Governor and Legislators**

MADISON, WI – The bipartisan Wisconsin Elections Commission is cautioning legislators that staffing reductions in the current budget proposal will significantly curtail the agency’s ability to serve candidates, local election officials and voters. Members of the Elections Commission and its staff will attend the Joint Finance Committee’s agency briefing on March 28 and will request continuation of six positions as requested in the agency’s original budget proposal.

At their meeting Tuesday, Commissioners thanked Governor Walker for replacing most of the federal funds that have supported the agency’s budget and which will expire in 2018. But they said the Commission needs all 22 of its current federally-funded positions to keep up with expanding state and federal election laws. Governor Walker’s budget proposes funding 16 of the 22 positions.

Commissioners approved and signed separate letters to Governor Walker and legislative leaders.

“We greatly appreciate that your 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,” Commissioners wrote to Governor Walker.

The Governor’s 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 and polling place accessibility audits. However, the six positions it would eliminate are vitally important to serving the agency’s customers and fulfilling its mission. The federally funded positions previously were reduced by four in the current biennium.

In their letter to legislative leaders, Commissioners said they unanimously approved a budget requesting state funding to replace 22 federally-funded positions. “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,” the letter said.

“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,” Commissioners wrote to legislators.

Copies of the letters to the Governor and legislators are attached.

## **WEC Budget Fact Sheet**

- The federal Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) appropriated \$56.8 million to the State of Wisconsin.
- The former State Elections Board used the federal funds largely to help municipalities buy accessible voting equipment and to build and maintain Wisconsin’s first statewide voter registration system, which went online in 2006.
- The registration system, known as WisVote, allows Wisconsin’s 1,853 municipal clerks to manage elections and maintain current, accurate and secure voter lists to help ensure election integrity.
- The state has also used HAVA funds to help train municipal and county clerks to use the voter registration system and to ensure that polling places are accessible.
- In previous budgets the WEC’s predecessors (SEB and G.A.B.) had budget authority for up to 26 federally-funded positions, which supported the voter registration system, trained local election officials and handled voting equipment matters.
- The current budget reduced federally-funded positions by 15 percent to 22 positions.
- Overall, the WEC has 31.75 full-time equivalent positions.
- Wisconsin’s federal HAVA funds will finally be spent at the end of fiscal 2018. Some other states have already exhausted their HAVA funds, and Congress has indicated it will not appropriate additional funds.
- In its 2017-2019 budget request, the bipartisan WEC asked Governor Walker and the Legislature for approximately \$2.44 million to replace the federal funding, which represents 55 percent of the \$4.43 million agency budget in FY-19.
- The WEC also asked to maintain the 22 currently federally funded employees and convert all positions from federal to state funds beginning July 1, 2018.
- The estimated salary and fringe benefit cost for the six positions is approximately \$364,000.

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The Wisconsin Elections Commission is responsible for administration and enforcement of election laws in Wisconsin. The Commission is made up of six Commissioners – four appointed directly by the State Senate Majority Leader, Speaker of the Assembly and the Minority Leaders in the State Senate and Assembly. The remaining two Commissioners are by the Governor with confirmation by the State Senate from lists of former municipal and county clerks submitted by the legislative leadership in each party.