

# Government Accountability Board

## State of Wisconsin

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### **In-Person Absentee (Early) Voting Off to Robust Start**

MADISON, WI – More than 225,000 Wisconsin residents have requested absentee ballots so far – including more than 100,000 in clerks’ offices – for the November 6 General Election, according to the Government Accountability Board.

“We are seeing long lines at many municipal clerks’ offices around the state,” said Kevin J. Kennedy, Wisconsin’s chief election official. “One in five ballots (633,610) cast in 2008 were absentee, and we expect to see similar numbers in 2012.”

As of late Thursday, at least 225,209 absentee ballots had been issued by Wisconsin’s local election officials who track them using the Statewide Voter Registration System (SVRS). There were 101,253 ballots issued in clerks’ offices, and 123,956 ballots issued by mail.

Comparable numbers from four years ago are not available. About one third of municipalities track absentee ballots in SVRS, including all the state’s large cities.

In-person absentee voting in the clerk’s office runs through 5 p.m. or the close of business on Friday, November 2, whichever is later. Some clerks are offering extended hours to handle demand.

Kennedy offered these tips for voters who are thinking of voting early in the clerk’s office:

- Check your municipal clerk’s office hours. Some clerks, especially in smaller municipalities, do not have regular 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. office hours. In some places, you may need to make an appointment.
- Remember that voting is at municipal clerks’ offices, not county clerks’ offices.
- You can find your clerk’s location and contact information at My Vote Wisconsin: <http://myvote.wi.gov>.
- While you are at My Vote Wisconsin, make sure your registration information is current. If it is not, you can fill out a registration form online, print it, sign it and bring it with you to the clerk’s office. Your information will be waiting in the clerk’s computer system.
- If you are registering at the clerk’s office, be sure to bring an acceptable proof of residence document because the open registration period ended October 17. You can find a list of documents under “Information About Voting” at the My Vote Wisconsin website.

- Consider waiting for Election Day to vote. The lines may well be shorter, especially if you vote at off-peak times.

“In the 2008 election, there were 633,610 absentee ballots, and two-thirds were cast in the clerk’s office. The numbers of absentee voters continues to grow,” said Kennedy, director and general counsel of the G.A.B. “There could be many reasons – voter enthusiasm and convenience.”

Elections Division Administrator Nat Robinson said in the past, the G.A.B. has received reports from clerks that a few people who come in to vote are confused about the difference between Wisconsin’s practice of in-person absentee voting and true early voting offered in other states.

“Some people who vote in the clerk’s office expect to be able to put their ballot into a tabulating machine or a ballot box,” Robinson said. “Under Wisconsin law, these ballots must be put into sealed certificate envelopes and sent to the polling place or a central count location on Election Day, where they will be opened and tabulated by election inspectors.”

Mailed absentee ballots must be postmarked by Election Day, and must be received by the clerk by 4 p.m. the Friday after the election.

Kennedy noted that there is a popular misperception that absentee ballots are not counted unless an election is close. “Every absentee ballot that has been properly cast will be counted,” Kennedy said.

Because of the popularity of absentee voting, many political parties, committees and interest groups mail out absentee ballot applications to voters they believe will support their candidates. The G.A.B. and municipal clerks around the state continue to receive complaints about these mailers because they contain political messages. But a bigger problem is that some mailers may have an incorrect address for the clerk’s office where they need to be sent, which could delay or prevent a voter from receiving an absentee ballot.

The deadline for clerks to receive a request for an absentee ballot by mail is 5 p.m. Thursday, November 1. Voters who request an absentee ballot using a flier they received in the mail should double check the clerk’s mailing address in the event of an error, Kennedy said.

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The Government Accountability Board (G.A.B.) is responsible for administration and enforcement of campaign finance, elections, ethics and lobbying laws in Wisconsin. The G.A.B. is made up of six non-partisan, former judges and is supported by an agency of non-partisan staff members.