

Government Accountability Board

State of Wisconsin

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What Voters Need to Know About Registration and Absentee Ballot Mailings

MADISON, WI – Wisconsin voters’ best sources of information about voter registration and absentee voting are their local clerk and MyVote.WI.gov, not mailings from political parties and independent groups, according to the Government Accountability Board.

The G.A.B. and municipal clerks around the state have started receiving numerous questions and complaints about recent direct mailings on voter registration and absentee voting because they contain campaign messages and even errors that could interfere with voting, said Kevin J. Kennedy, director and general counsel of the G.A.B.

“Every election we get complaints about these types of mailings,” Kennedy said. “Political parties and interest groups send out glossy mailers to encourage voters to register or apply for an absentee ballot to vote by mail. While these mailings are permissible, our advice to voters is to examine them carefully before relying on them for definitive information about participating in the electoral process. Preferably, voters should rely instead on their local municipal clerk’s office or our new MyVote.WI.gov website.”

The biggest problem with mailers this election cycle is that some of them contain incorrect return mailing addresses for municipal clerks. Many voters received mailers from the Republican Party of Wisconsin, for instance, that mistakenly included a return address for the clerk’s office in the town of Albion in Dane County.

Incorrect addresses for the clerk’s office result in the request being misdirected or delayed or worse, the ballot not being counted, said Elections Division Administrator Nat Robinson.

“Wisconsin’s municipal clerks are conscientious and diligent, and they do their best to send misdirected voter registrations and absentee ballot applications to the right place,” Robinson said. However, ensuring that misdirected registration forms and absentee ballot applications actually get to the proper municipality in time cannot be guaranteed.

These mailings also generate unnecessary work for municipal clerks because some people who are already registered fill out the forms and send them in, Robinson said. “Voters can spend two minutes online at MyVote.WI.gov and see whether their registration is current,” he said.

Additionally, voter registration and absentee voting mailers often contain political messages, leading some people to mistakenly believe the mailers are coming from their municipal clerk or the Government Accountability Board. “The G.A.B. and Wisconsin’s municipal clerks are non-partisan, and would never send out partisan political mailings,” Kennedy said.

Voters who need to register or change their address should go to MyVote.WI.gov, Wisconsin’s new voter services website, Robinson said. The website is designed to deliver personalized information for each voter, so start by choosing the kind of voter you are, and enter your name and date of birth to see your own voter record. Electors who need to register for the first time, or need to update their voter record, are strongly encouraged to do so as soon as possible and not wait until Election Day.

People can fill out the registration form online, print it out, sign it and send it to the correct clerk’s address which the website will provide. The system will save the voter’s information so when the signed form arrives at the clerk’s office, the voter will be in the system awaiting approval.

Voters without online computer access should look up their municipal clerk’s office in the phone book or call their city, village or town hall.

MyVote.WI.gov will deliver absentee ballots online only for military and permanent overseas voters, as authorized by law. Regular Wisconsin voters who need to get an absentee ballot can use MyVote.WI.gov to find their correct clerk’s address and contact information, then make the request in writing, or by fax or email.

Most voters who wish to cast absentee ballots by mail must make their request by 5 p.m. the Thursday before the election. Voters who are military or overseas, or who are indefinitely confined due to age, disability, infirmity or illness may request absentee ballots by 5 p.m. the Friday before the election. For this federal election, military voters who are on active duty away from their residence may request an absentee ballot until 5 p.m. on Election Day. All absentee ballots must be postmarked by Election Day, and received by 4 p.m. Friday, November 9 to be counted.

Those wishing to vote early may also do so in-person at their municipal clerk’s office during normal business hours starting Monday, October 22. The period for in-person absentee voting ends Friday, November 2 at 5 p.m. or the close of business, whichever is later.

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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.