

Government Accountability Board

State of Wisconsin

212 E. Washington Ave., Third Floor • Madison, WI 53703 • gab@wi.gov • (608) 266-8005 • Help Desk (608) 261-2028 • <http://gab.wi.gov>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
November 17, 2010

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:
Reid Magney, 608-267-7887

Accountability Board Invites Public Comments about Election Observer Rules

MADISON, WI – The Government Accountability Board will hold a public hearing on proposed permanent rules for polling place election observers at its December 13 meeting.

“Observers have been ensuring openness and transparency in Wisconsin elections for many years,” said Kevin Kennedy, Wisconsin’s chief election officer. “Establishing this rule for observers is just one of the steps we have taken to promote orderly conduct at polling places.”

In 2008, the G.A.B. issued a new set of rules for election observers, which were modified slightly for 2010. The new rules were designed to address concerns that voters were confusing observers with election officials at the polling places. The Board is now preparing to make the rules permanent.

Kennedy urged members of the public to submit written comments to the Board if they are unable to attend the public hearing in Madison. “If you have served as an election worker or observer, please tell us about how the rules are working – or not working – in the real world on Election Day,” Kennedy said. “We also want to know whether election observers made voters feel reassured or uncomfortable.”

The public hearing will be one of the first agenda items during the Board’s meeting, scheduled for 9:30 a.m. Monday, December 13. Comments can be submitted online at <http://gab.wi.gov>, or by e-mail to gabpubliccomment@wi.gov, or by mail to Wisconsin Government Accountability Board, P.O. Box 7984, Madison, WI 53707-7984.

Prior to the election, there was much public comment about election observers in Wisconsin. “We received a large number of inquiries about election observer rules,” said Nat Robinson, Elections Division administrator. “Many people requested brochures, badges and sign-in sheets. So far, the Board has received very few complaints about election observers at Wisconsin’s 2,834 polling places.”

The rules require observers to meet with the chief election inspector, sign in, and wear name tags so voters can easily distinguish observers from election officials. In 2010, the only change in the observer rules was that members of the news media are no longer required to get permission from the chief inspector before taking video or still pictures in the polling place, though they must still check in with the chief inspector. The rules have been widely credited with helping to maintain order at polling places during the last two general elections.

For more information on the new rules for election observers, visit the G.A.B. website: <http://gab.wi.gov/clerks/education-training/election-observers>.

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.