

Government Accountability Board

State of Wisconsin

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New Voter ID Law Requires Voters to Sign Poll List

MADISON, WI – One of the biggest changes for voters in this summer’s recall and special elections will be that they must now sign their name on the poll list before receiving a ballot, according to the Government Accountability Board.

While the requirement for voters to show a photo ID to receive a ballot does not begin until February 2012, the requirement to sign the poll list starts now, said Kevin J. Kennedy, director and general counsel of the G.A.B. There is an exception for voters with a physical disability.

“Many states require voters to sign the poll list before they can receive their ballot,” Kennedy said, noting that signing the poll list serves two important purposes.

“In the past, election workers have marked the voter’s name on the poll list with a sequential number to indicate he or she has received a ballot,” Kennedy said. “However, they occasionally place the number by the wrong name or forget, which can cause problems. When someone shows up at the polls and finds out he has already been marked as having voted, it raises concerns about election fraud. However, we have found that most instances are due to clerical errors. We believe that having voters sign the poll list next to their names will eliminate most of these kinds of errors.”

“The other advantage of having voters sign the poll list is that in the unlikely event someone would attempt to impersonate a voter, law enforcement will now have forensic evidence that could be used to prosecute the offender,” Kennedy said.

Elections Division Administrator Nathaniel E. Robinson noted that while showing a photo ID is optional until February 2012, signing the poll book is now mandatory, unless the voter identifies a disability that prevents them from doing so. “If the voter refuses to sign the poll list, the voter will not be able to vote,” Robinson said.

Under the Voter ID Law, which went into effect on June 10, voters must be asked to show a photo ID when they give their name and address, but will not be required to present a photo ID to receive a ballot until the Spring Primary Election in February 2012. At any election before then, a voter who does not have a photo ID will receive an informational document explaining the requirements of the new law.

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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.