

**Testimony of Kevin J. Kennedy**  
**Director and General Counsel**  
**Wisconsin Government Accountability Board**

**Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections**

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**Room 412 East, State Capitol**

**Public Hearing**

**Online Voter Registration**

Chairperson Bernier and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss online voter registration. I am appearing here for information purposes and to answer any questions you may have.

**Online Voter Registration**

Legislation that enables online voter registration would make a tremendous leap forward in the administration of elections in Wisconsin. Online voter registration is no longer a cutting-edge innovation. It is a well-established and essential tool for providing registration services to our voters.

The Statewide Voter Registration System (SVRS) is the backbone of election administration in the state of Wisconsin. It touches all actors involved in the electoral process: voters, candidates, clerks and poll workers. SVRS is central to all aspects of the electoral process as well. It is essential that SVRS is accurate,

current and operated in the most efficient manner possible. Online voter registration furthers those goals.

The basic voter registration data will be more accurate if it is entered online by the voter. Online registration eliminates data entry errors resulting from difficult to decipher paper forms. The vast majority of our citizens already conduct extensive business online. Voters are more likely to update their information in a timely manner if an efficient and reliable means is readily available. The workload for municipal clerks would be substantially reduced if they do not have to sort through mountains of paper during peak election administration periods. This would result in increased efficiency and significantly reduced data entry and follow up costs.

By taking advantage of technology, we can significantly improve the accuracy, cost-effectiveness, efficiency and integrity of Wisconsin's voter registration system while delivering high quality service to the Wisconsin voter. The G.A.B. continues to work toward this objective.

In 2012, the G.A.B. staff developed and deployed an online voter registration form that allows citizens to complete almost all the steps necessary to register online. The form captures the person's information and saves it to a pending file in the Statewide Voter Registration System. The person prints the form, signs it, and mails or delivers it to their municipal clerk. When the form arrives at the clerk's office, the registration data does not have to be re-entered into SVRS.

Since September 2012, approximately 26,500 people have used the MyVote Wisconsin system to register or change their voter registration information, compared to nearly 535,500 who have used conventional paper forms.

We believe an entirely online system would be much more popular with the public, improve the accuracy of voter registration data, and be much more cost effective

for local election officials. A system that allows the G.A.B. to verify driver license or state identification card information with the Department of Transportation's DMV database in real time would provide added security and efficiency in voter registration. It would also allow registered voters to update their records online in the event they change their name or address.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 20 states currently offer online voter registration. Six more states have passed legislation allowing online registration, but have not yet implemented them. Five more states allow limited online registration.

The first state to offer online voter registration was Arizona in 2002. Published research has found that in Maricopa County, Arizona, the state's online voter registration system significantly reduced the cost for each application processed. Each paper application cost at least 83 cents of staff time to process, compared to 3 cents for each online application. In 2008, online voter applications saved Maricopa County alone more than \$370,000. Some of the savings came from not hiring additional temporary workers to process paper application forms.

It would be difficult to estimate potential savings from online voter registration in Wisconsin because our state's system is the most decentralized in the nation. Currently, 1,852 city, village, and town election officials are responsible for processing paper voter registration forms. Some larger municipalities will process thousands of forms before each election while a smaller town will have only a handful of registration forms to be reviewed and entered into SVRS.

Last fall, the G.A.B. staff worked with University of Wisconsin graduate students at the LaFollette School of Public Affairs to evaluate the cost savings associated with online voter registration. The students prepared a detailed analysis looking at

the costs of traditional registration versus on line voter registration at all levels of government in Wisconsin. The graduate students concluded if online voter registration was in place, the total savings across all units of government would be more than \$1 million over a 10 year period. We provided a copy of the report to the Committee Chair on February 10, 2014, and the report is available on our website. A summary of the student team's findings is enclosed as a memo from the students to G.A.B. staff.

One practical problem we know online voter registration will help solve is the scourge of door-to-door voter registration drives. In theory, grassroots voter registration efforts ease a burden on local election officials and improve voter turnout. In practice, they generate thousands of duplicate registration forms from voters who are not sure whether they are already registered. Many of those forms are often not delivered to local election officials until the last minute. The same could be said of mail voter registration drives, which often direct voters to send their applications to the wrong clerk's office based on a mailing address instead of municipal boundaries. Some voter registration drives have not been without fraud, whether due to malicious intent or to workers trying to make a quota. Local election officials using SVRS were able to catch all these fraudulent applications before they were entered into the system, but this amounted to a huge investment in time.

Finally, in this time of rapid technological change the question of security of online voter registration should be addressed. Online registration is built on the exchange of data between two of state government's most comprehensive databases. Both SVRS and the Department of Transportation driver records file have been designed and built to protect the integrity of the data collected from voters and drivers. Key elements of the data, such as dates of birth and social security numbers are shielded

from public inspection. SVRS benefits from the security protocols and disaster recovery processes put in place by the Department of Administration as part of its information technology services to state agencies.

G.A.B. staff implemented a number of security protocols for its online products, which it would incorporate into an online voter registration portal. For example, MyVote Wisconsin utilizes the CAPTCHA process to protect against automated attacks on the application. CAPTCHA displays a series of letters or numbers that are unreadable by automated computer programs and determine that the person interacting with the website is in fact a human being.

G.A.B. staff recommends that voters submit an additional piece of personal information with each new or changed registration to authenticate the transaction. This could include having voters provide the last four digits of their social security number (in addition to the name, date of birth, and driver license number required in recent drafts of proposed online voter registration bills) as an additional verification step to help ensure the voter is registering him or herself. Voters could also be required to enter the issuance date of their driver license or Department of Transportation identification card as part of the online registration process. This date is only accessible on the physical license.

In 2012, a group of computer scientists raised a series of concerns about the security of Maryland's online voter registration system. G.A.B. staff was asked to develop a Wisconsin-based response to these security concerns. A copy of the G.A.B. analysis has been provided to Committee members along with this testimony.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you for your consideration of our views. I would be happy to respond to any questions Committee Members may have at this time.