



Wisconsin Elections Commission

212 East Washington Avenue | Third Floor | P.O. Box 7984 | Madison, WI 53707-7984
(608) 266-8005 | elections@wi.gov | elections.wi.gov

March 20, 2020

Dear Governor Evers,

I am writing as the Chief Election Official for the State of Wisconsin to request your immediate action to support the upcoming April 7, 2020 statewide election and presidential preference primary. Voting for the April 7 statewide election is underway in Wisconsin's 1,850 municipalities. As new concerns emerge daily related to COVID-19 we must work closely with our federal, state and local government partners to ensure that every eligible Wisconsinite can safely participate in the election. At the March 18 meeting of the six-member Wisconsin Elections Commission, the commission unanimously moved to adopt a six-part directive. Specific to their directive, we request the following:

1. Assistance securing a supply of sanitation resources for local election officials
2. Assistance with recruiting poll workers
3. Access to public health officials to create accurate guidance for local election officials.

On April 7 there will be nearly 2,000 polling places requiring more than 20,000 poll workers and the potential of up to 2,000,000 voters or their absentee ballots. Elections are large public gatherings. In most other areas of our now daily lives, public gatherings have been prohibited. As required by law, in-person absentee voting and in-person registration extend these election gatherings to sites around the state for the next 18 days. Many of our trusted election custodians are over the age of 60. Others have health concerns that may place them at risk. Further, almost every municipality around the state has conveyed they do not have access to the sanitation supplies directed by public health officials.

As of today, local election officials do not have access to the people or supplies needed. This leaves voters, clerks, and poll workers to make difficult choices. Voters should not have to choose between voting or staying healthy. Poll workers should not have to choose between serving their community or staying healthy. Our local election officials should not have to choose between facilitating democracy or staying healthy.

I believe in our state and in our ability to find a way to do both. We need critical assistance to support elections in finding the people and the resources needed to make certain that each eligible citizen can exercise both their right to vote and their right to do so in a way that will not potentially jeopardize their health. On behalf of the Wisconsin Elections Commission and local election officials I am making the following requests.

Wisconsin Elections Commissioners

Dean Knudson, chair | Marge Bostelmann | Julie M. Glancey | Ann S. Jacobs | Robert Spindell | Mark L. Thomsen

Administrator
Meagan Wolfe

1) Hand Sanitizer and Supplies

The Center for Disease Control has issued directions specific to elections and polling places to prevent the spread of COVID-19. That guidance recommends that voters and poll workers have access to hand sanitizer and surface cleaning supplies. It also discusses using cleaners on voting equipment in accordance with manufacturers' instructions.

Local election officials do not have access to the supplies they need. In almost every community in the state, local election officials have reported they cannot find, purchase, or manufacture the hand sanitizer, hand washing stations, or surface and equipment wipes needed to keep them safe. At the Elections Commission we have also explored all avenues and lack access to obtain resources to distribute to local election officials. This is not a problem we have 18 days to solve, this is a problem today. The statutory requirements for in-person absentee and registration paired with the exemption of voting locations from the prohibition on gatherings more than 10 people, our local election officials are reporting they feel as though they are in limbo as we speak. We will continue to advise election offices on things they can do to meet the guidance, such as access to soap and water and working with their county health department. We are also exploring all available resources through the state, including working with manufacturers and distilleries to find raw materials.

I ask you to allocate any sanitation resources available through the state to protect the health of our voters, our local election officials, and our poll workers. Allow our local election officials access to the supplies they need to protect themselves through the state's allocation of their resource pool. Protect our public servants and the keepers of our democracy and protect our voters who are exercising their sacred right to vote.

2) Recruitment of Poll Workers

Even during the best of times, staffing polling places in each municipality requires a monumental effort on the part of local election officials. It also relies on at least 20,000 citizens of our state to be willing to serve as poll workers. In previous elections, more than 50% of Wisconsin's poll workers are over the age considered to be more at risk to develop serious illness from COVID-19. Local election officials around the state have expressed that they have exhausted their lists of backup poll workers; many poll workers have already conveyed they will be unable to serve. Clerks are also concerned that poll workers who are currently scheduled may become unavailable on Election Day. Local election officials have already begun recruiting students, government employees, and private industry employees to serve as poll workers and are continuing to find they are short the needed number. Poll workers must be trained in order to facilitate and safeguard the integrity of each vote. Training must start now so they can be adequately prepared in voter registration, tabulation, poll books, photo ID, and more.

I ask you to stand with me and call on Wisconsinites who are able to serve in place of experienced poll workers who are unable. I also ask you to join me in this call to action now. There are many people looking for ways to serve their community during this uncertain time. I am confident that if we put out the call, they will answer.

3) Need for a Health Official Liaison

The staff of the Wisconsin Elections Commission are experts in election law and policy. We are not, however, experts in public health nor have we had exposure to these challenges in the past. One of our agency's core responsibilities is to provide training and guidance to the 1,850 municipal and 72 county election officials. With the current COVID-19 crisis, we are tasked to guide our clerk partners through the intersection of public health and elections. As guidance changes daily, we are left to wonder if what we have provided is sufficient and will help to protect clerks and voters.

I ask you to assign the Elections Commission a Public Health expert dedicated to our office through this crisis. This person would help to create and review the documentation and training designed to keep clerks, poll workers, and voters safe by ensuring our guidance is accurate and that it complies with current health guidance. Decisions will need to be made very quickly in the next 18 days as the threat and guidance change. Our 1,922 local election officials, 20,000 poll workers, and potentially 2,000,000 voters are counting on us to protect them. We need expertise to guide us through this process.

We must act now. Any delay may jeopardize our democracy and the health of our citizens. Elections are designated as national, Critical Infrastructure – one of the sectors considered the pillars of our society. Today we stand before an opportunity to choose to reinforce this pillar together to support thriving elections in Wisconsin. I look forward to working with you on this most important mission.

Yours in service to our great state,



Meagan Wolfe
Administrator, Chief Election Official
Wisconsin Election Commission