



Wisconsin Elections Commission

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
September 2, 2022

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Budget Request to Prepare WEC for New Era

MADISON, Wis. – The Wisconsin Elections Commission is preparing for a new era of elections administration by submitting a 2023–25 budget request that will increase the agency’s capacity to meet the growing needs of Wisconsinites and to ensure election confidence for another generation.

On Wednesday, the six-member, bipartisan Commission unanimously approved a request for approximately \$1.3 million annually to establish the Office of the Elections Inspector General within the agency. The program would increase the agency’s ability to research and respond to the unprecedented increase in the number of public and legislative inquiries the WEC receives, and to ensure that Wisconsin’s election laws are being followed.

The new division would enhance what the agency is already doing to provide a wide range of election information to the public, explore and respond to potential violations of election law, and promote best practices designed to increase accuracy of election results, thereby increasing confidence in Wisconsin’s elections.

“To put it plainly, the election landscape since this agency was established in 2016 is nearly unrecognizable,” said WEC Administrator Meagan Wolfe. “The profile, prominence, and importance of Wisconsin’s election administration has changed drastically, and public engagement with, and scrutiny of, the agency is higher than at any point in its seven-year history. Wisconsinites rightly expect our agency to meet the changing needs of the public. This proposal will help us do so.”

The Inspector General proposal is needs-driven. Since 2016, the average number of public records requests received per month by the WEC has increased nearly eight-fold, from about two per month in 2016 to more than 16 per month in 2022. Formal election complaints the agency adjudicates have soared as well. Before 2020, the agency received an average of about 15 formal complaints annually. Since 2020, that number has increased to more than 50 per year.

The Elections Inspector General program would consist of 10 additional full-time staff members at the agency, including the Elections Inspector General, who would be appointed by the administrator.

Specifically, the office would:

- Allow the Commission to expand the number and scope of post-election voting equipment audits, pre-election tests, and testing and certification programs.
- Allow the Commission to expand the number and scope of polling place accessibility audits.
- Assist with research regarding formal complaints of election law violations, including allegations of persons providing false or misleading information to an elected official during the registration or voting process.
- Research claims of non-compliance of election officials.

Wisconsin Elections Commissioners

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

Administrator
Meagan Wolfe

- Fulfill open records requests in accordance with Wisconsin law.
- Respond to legislative inquiries and requests for information and assistance.
- Respond to public inquiries.
- Help maintain quality voter data.
- Counter false information about elections.

Following the Commission's unanimous approval of the proposal, the WEC is planning to send the budget proposal to the Department of Administration by the deadline of September 15. After that, the budget request would need to be approved by both the Governor and Legislature during 2023-25 budget deliberations.

"This office would not be about dwelling in the past or giving credence to claims that threaten the credibility of Wisconsin's accurate and secure elections," Wolfe said. "Instead, the Office of the Inspector General will serve all the people of Wisconsin regardless of political party, or what kind of grievance they may have."

Bolstering the agency's ability to provide the public with facts in a timely manner about how Wisconsin's election system works can help reduce the spread of misinformation, thereby increasing public trust and confidence in Wisconsin's accurate and secure elections infrastructure.