



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

DATE: September 4, 2020

TO: All Wisconsin Election Officials

FROM: Meagan Wolfe
Administrator

SUBJECT: WEC Voter Information Mailer FAQs and Template Email Responses

On September 1, 2020, the Wisconsin Elections Commission sent an informational mailer regarding voting options to 2.6 million registered voters across the state. The mailer was unanimously approved by the bipartisan Commission and they directed staff to carry out the creating, printing, and distribution of this mailer. The Commission determined that all registered voters who did not have an active request on file for the November General Election would receive the mailer. The mailer contains both an information sheet on all three ways a voter can cast their ballot for November and a blank absentee ballot request form. An example of the mailer was previously provided to all local election officials and can also be found here: <https://elections.wi.gov/node/7046>.

WEC staff began receiving calls from voters who received the mailer on September 2, and clerks have reported receiving questions from voters as well. These questions fall into several general categories and we wanted to provide information regarding these issues so that clerks can better answer questions from voters and understand the impact of the mailer. We also wanted to provide you with template email responses that you can customize and use with your voters who have questions regarding the mailing.

Here are some examples of the general questions we have received:

Who authorized this mailing?

The members of the bipartisan Commission voted unanimously to approve this mailing and directed staff to carry out the creation, printing and distribution of the mailing.

Why was it sent out to voters?

The Commission wanted to provide information on the different ways all Wisconsin voters can cast their ballots this fall far in advance of the election so voters have time to prepare and request an absentee ballot early, if that is their choice, so clerks will not be overwhelmed with last-minute requests. The mailer does not just focus on voting absentee by mail but outlines all three options a voter has to participate in the November General Election. The mailing also contains a paper absentee request application for voters who do not have internet access and would like to request a ballot for November.

How was the mailing paid for?

Wisconsin Elections Commissioners

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

Administrator
Meagan Wolfe

Federal CARES Act funds were used to pay for it. The WEC received roughly \$7 million in CARES Act funds that could be used to cover COVID-related expenses for elections administration in 2020 and a portion of those funds was used to pay for the mailer.

When was the data for this mailer created and why did voters who have active absentee applications on file receive it?

The data set for this mailer needed to be created in June due to the lead time required by the state printing center to produce a mailing of this size. This timeline means that voters who submitted an absentee request between early June and the September 1 mailing date will receive this mailer and may have questions about the status of their absentee ballot request. We have provided a template email for your use in responding to these questions as an attachment to this communication.

If voters received the mailing but already have an active absentee request on file, do they need to do anything?

No, they do not need to take any action as long as their application is in good standing.

Where can I refer voters to confirm they have an active request on file?

Voters can confirm their request by looking up their information on MyVote using the absentee request status lookup tool: <https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/ViewMyAbsenteeRequest>.

Why am I getting calls about this mailer?

The mailer refers voters to the MyVote website for voting information, absentee requests and voter registration opportunities and only lists the WEC phone number for voter questions. Voters are reaching out to you as their local election official, but your contact information was not provided on the mailer.

This mailer is generating a lot of calls to clerks, but is it also providing any benefit?

Yes, traffic on MyVote has been heavy over the past few days. In total, voters have made almost 20,000 online absentee requests through the website that do not require any additional data entry by the clerk.

How will I receive the absentee requests that are sent to the WEC?

WEC staff will perform data entry on requests received at the WEC office as long as the voter is registered and an address can be determined. Applications are entered in a “pending” status and must be reviewed by clerks and be accepted or declined. For WisVote users, mailer pending applications are listed alongside MyVote pending applications. For clerks who do not directly access WisVote, applications will be emailed directly to the clerk to be processed or declined.

What should I do with the pending requests?

Managing absentee applications and ballots is a responsibility that rests solely with the clerk. WEC staff will data enter the requests in the state they are received, but it is up to the clerk to review the applications for completion and validity, along with validating that photo ID requirements have been met. Clerks should expect to receive requests where a photo ID is not provided or not valid.

What happens when a request is declined? Who follows up with the voter?

WEC staff will send letters to voters who submit requests that are declined by the clerk for reasons of insufficient photo ID or for failing to certify indefinitely confined status with a signature. If the voter has an email address on file, an email will be sent to the voter with the letter information as well.

Where can I get more information on how to handle pending mailer applications?

Additional instructions for reliers are attached to this communication. Additional instructions for WisVote users have been posted to the WisVote News tile in WisVote. Pending mailer applications will also be covered in the September 8, 2020 webinar titled “WisVote Absentee Omnibus”.

Will I be receiving any of the paper absentee request forms from the mailer directly from voters?

The return envelope that was provided along with the mailer lists the WEC address as the return address. Clerks may receive some of these forms from voters who independently choose to return the form to you rather than using the return envelope. If complete, these requests can be processed like any other absentee application you receive from a voter.

Please do not hesitate to contact us at (608)261-2028 or at elections@wi.gov with any questions you may have.

Template Email Responses:

Voter Question: I thought I had already requested an absentee ballot for November?

Template Response:

Thanks for the question. I can confirm that you have an active absentee request on file with our office and you do not need to take any additional action in order to receive a ballot. Ballots for the November 3 election will start to go out in the mail on or around September 17 and you should receive your ballot shortly thereafter. You can check the status of your ballot on the MyVote Wisconsin website here: <https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/ViewMyAbsenteeRequest>.

Please note the data set for this mailer needed to be created in June due to the lead time required by the state printing center to produce a mailing of this size. This timeline means that voters who submitted an absentee request between early June and the September 1 mailing date will receive this mailer even if they have an active request on file.

Voter Question: Why did I receive this?

Template Response:

Thanks for the question. You received this mailing because at the time the mailing list was created you were a registered Wisconsin voter without an active absentee request on file with our office.

The State of Wisconsin Elections Commission wanted to provide information on the different ways all Wisconsin voters can cast their ballot this fall far in advance of the election so voters have time to prepare and request an absentee ballot early, if that is their choice, so clerks will not be overwhelmed with last-minute requests. The mailer does not just focus on voting absentee by mail but outlines all three options a voter has to participate in the November General Election. The mailing also contains a paper absentee request application for voter who do not have internet access and would like to request a ballot.

Voter Question: I don't want to vote absentee, does this mean I have to?

Template Response:

Thanks for the question. No, you can still vote in person at your polling place on election day or vote early in the clerk's office during the in-person absentee voting period. You are not required to vote by absentee ballot for the November 3 election. Many voters are interested in voting by mail and have never done so before so the Commissioners decided to provide information about voting options ahead of election day.

Voter Question: Is this mailing legitimate?

Template Response:

Thanks for the question. Yes, this is a legitimate informational mailing from the State of Wisconsin Elections Commission. The mailing was unanimously approved by the bipartisan members of the Commission during several public meetings earlier this year. The State of Wisconsin Elections Commission wanted to provide information on the different ways all Wisconsin voters can cast their ballot this fall far in advance of the election so voters have time to prepare and request an absentee ballot early, if that is their choice, so clerks will not be overwhelmed with last-minute requests. Feel free to disregard the mailing if you already have the information you need about voting in the November 3, 2020 election.