

Government Accountability Board

State of Wisconsin

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Beware of Unofficial Voter Registration Applications

MADISON, WI – The Government Accountability Board has received questions and complaints about unofficial voter registration forms recently mailed to Wisconsin residents.

Kevin Kennedy, Wisconsin’s chief election officer, said that while it is legal for groups and political parties to produce and distribute voter registration forms, residents who wish to register to vote need not rely on them. “If you need or want to register to vote, contact your municipal clerk directly and request an application,” Kennedy said. “You can also download an official Wisconsin voter registration form from the G.A.B. website, fill it out and mail it directly to the clerk.”

The G.A.B. has recently seen unofficial voter registration forms that contain errors, including an incorrect address for the G.A.B., Kennedy said. “The group distributing these forms – Voter Participation Center – is a legitimate nonprofit group registered with the Internal Revenue Service. However, there are some problems with their mailing,” he said.

VPC has told the G.A.B. that its goal is to register unmarried women to vote because they believe that group is underrepresented in the electorate. The group uses commercially-available data to identify names and addresses of women they believe are unregistered. However, G.A.B. is aware that some of the women receiving these applications are in their early teens – too young to register to vote.

VPC contacted the G.A.B. late in 2011, asking staff to review its proposed mailing for errors. The staff pointed out several errors, some of which were corrected, and some of which were not. Specifically, the G.A.B. asked VPC not to have residents send their voter registration forms directly to the G.A.B., since voter registration is handled by Wisconsin’s 1,850 municipal clerks.

Kennedy said that any voter registration forms the G.A.B. receives from this or any other group will be returned to the group, with instructions to send them to the correct clerks. “It is the responsibility of any group registering voters to ensure that the applications are sent to the proper local election official,” Kennedy said. “In Wisconsin, that is not the Government Accountability Board.”

Elections Division Administrator Nathaniel E. Robinson said the staff previously warned VPC that any voter registration forms received by the G.A.B. would “encounter significant delay.”

“If you rely on an unofficial voter registration form, you may be too late to register in advance,” Robinson said. “However, Wisconsin does have Election Day Registration, and anyone qualified can register and vote at the polls on Election Day with proper identification and documentation.”

Voters are encouraged to visit the G.A.B. website for information about registering to vote: <http://gab.wi.gov/elections-voting/voters/registration-voting>. To see whether you are registered, visit G.A.B.’s Voter Public Access website (<http://vpa.wi.gov>) for information, including polling place locations.

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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.