

Wisconsin Elections Commission

State of Wisconsin

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Elections Commission Approves Supplemental Poll Books for Spring Election

MADISON, WI – The Wisconsin Elections Commission has approved the use of new supplemental poll books for the April 3 Spring Election so that all eligible voters can cast a ballot.

“If you are a registered voter but your name is not on the regular poll list, poll workers will look for you on the supplemental poll list,” said Meagan Wolfe, Wisconsin’s chief election official. “If your name is there, you will receive a ballot if you sign the supplemental poll list affirming that your address has not changed.”

The Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC) approved the use of new supplemental poll books on March 2 in response to problems at the February 20 Spring Primary that required a small number of voters who had not moved to reregister. The problems stemmed from a new process designed to identify voters who had moved and would need to reregister at their new addresses.

“These new supplemental poll books are a safety net for voters,” said Wolfe. “Our goal is to ensure that all eligible voters who have not moved are able to vote without reregistering at the Spring Election on April 3 or in future elections.”

“We apologize to the voters who did not move but had to reregister in February,” Wolfe said. “We are committed to making sure this doesn’t happen again, and we promise to investigate how this happened and to improve the process in the future.”

Background

State law requires the WEC to conduct regular voter list maintenance activities to remove people from the active voter list who have died, moved or become inactive after a period of time. Maintaining current and accurate poll lists ensures that only eligible individuals are able to vote and improves the process for voters and poll workers.

After every November election, WEC identifies people who have not voted in any election in the past four years and mails postcards to those voters, asking whether they wish to remain registered. Many of those postcards are returned as undeliverable or the voters do not respond because they have moved.

In 2016, the Wisconsin Legislature required the state to join the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), a consortium of 23 states that use voter registration records, motor vehicle and driver licensing data, postal service records and death records to improve the accuracy of America’s voter rolls and increase access to voter registration for all eligible citizens. Members of the consortium securely submit this information to ERIC. After comparing the data, ERIC provides members with reports of voters who may have moved and individuals who may be eligible to vote but are not registered.

In September 2016, with data from ERIC, the state mailed 1.28 million postcards to Wisconsin adults who were identified as being eligible but unregistered to vote, encouraging them to register. This effort sought to add individuals to the voting rolls, and names were not removed because of this mailing. More information about this mailing is available here: <http://elections.wi.gov/node/4173>.

In November 2017, with data from ERIC, the state mailed postcards to approximately 343,000 registered voters who may have moved in-state and needed to reregister, or moved out of Wisconsin and are no longer eligible. This mailing was based on a comparison of data from the U.S. Postal Service, motor vehicle agencies and the state voter registration list. More information about this mailing is available here: <http://elections.wi.gov/node/5360>.

After the November mailing, the WEC deactivated the registrations of approximately 308,000 voters as a result of the November mailing, because either the Post Office returned the postcard as undeliverable, or the voter did not respond to confirm that they still lived at that address. Also, as a result of these mailings, tens of thousands of Wisconsin residents updated their voter registrations online, saving voters and poll workers time on Election Day.

At the February 20 Spring Primary, a small number of the 534,000 voters who turned out were required to reregister before voting because their names did not appear on the poll list. Some voters were correctly required to reregister because they had either moved or had not responded to a mailing after failing to vote for four years.

WEC immediately began investigating what happened to voters who had not moved and traced the problem primarily to issues related to processing the data used to identify the voters who were mailed the postcards in November. WEC approached the new process in much the same way as other ERIC states, but WEC staff has concluded that further analysis is required to determine whether the data used always indicates that a voter has moved.

“Determining whether voters have moved requires a partnership with other agencies including the DMV, the Postal Service and ERIC. All of us are committed to improving this process for Wisconsin moving forward,” Wolfe said.

After the April election, WEC staff will prepare a public report for the Commission to evaluate the supplemental poll list process so the Commission can determine the best course of action for the August Partisan Primary and November General Election. The report will also include an analysis of the specific causes of the problems that occurred in February, so we can continue to improve the process.

Voters who have moved are required to reregister at their new address. They can reregister between now and Friday, March 30, at their municipal clerk’s office, or at the polling place on Election Day. Voters may visit <https://MyVote.wi.gov>, where they can check their registration status, find out what’s on their ballot and locate their polling place.

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The Wisconsin Elections Commission is responsible for administration and enforcement of election laws in Wisconsin. The Commission is made up of six Commissioners – four appointed directly by the State Senate Majority Leader, Speaker of the Assembly and the Minority Leaders in the State Senate and Assembly. The remaining two Commissioners are by the Governor with confirmation by the State Senate from lists of former municipal and county clerks submitted by the legislative leadership in each party.