

# Wisconsin Elections Commission

## State of Wisconsin

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
March 12, 2020

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## **Elections Commission Takes Action on COVID-19 Issues for April 7 and May 12 Elections**

MADISON, WI – At a special meeting today, the Wisconsin Elections Commission took two actions designed to deal with concerns about COVID-19 Coronavirus in advance of the April 7 Spring Election and Presidential Preference Primary and the May 12 Special Election in Congressional District 7.

Governor Evers issued Executive Order #72 today proclaiming that a public health emergency exists in the State of Wisconsin as a result of the COVID-19 Coronavirus.

First, the Commission directed municipal clerks to mail absentee ballots directly to residents in nursing homes and care facilities instead of dispatching teams of special voting deputies to those places where vulnerable populations live. Normally, teams of special voting deputies and political party observers conduct voting in common areas and potentially in residents' rooms to assist with absentee voting.

“We understand the concern of protecting our most vulnerable voters is paramount,” said Meagan Wolfe, Wisconsin’s chief elections official. “The Commission is taking this action in consultation with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services and its pending directive to limit public visits to nursing homes and care facilities.”

Second, the Commission acted to give municipal clerks flexibility to relocate polling places currently slated to be in nursing homes and other facilities where public health is a concern. Under state law, municipalities must establish locations for polling places at least 30 days before an election, which has already passed for April 7. The Commission’s action will allow clerks to find alternate polling place locations as needed. The Commission will also help clerks publicize new polling place locations so voters can find them.

Wolfe said the WEC staff has been working continuously over the past week to assess the COVID-19 situation, provide clerks with sound guidance from the Centers for Disease Control, and develop additional guidance for clerks and voters in advance of the coming elections.

“We understand everyone has pressing and important concerns regarding COVID-19,” Wolfe said. “We share clerks’ mission and sense of urgency in ensuring each of Wisconsin’s voters has access to exercise their right to vote without jeopardizing their health or the health of others.”

The Commission will hold two special webinars for clerks on Monday to address COVID-19 issues and will continue to provide guidance as the situation develops.

Commission Chair Dean Knudson said the WEC may hold additional special meetings in the coming weeks to address additional public health concerns as they may arise, including encouraging Wisconsin residents request absentee ballots by mail or to vote absentee in-person before the election.

More information about COVID-19 guidance to clerks is posted on the Commission's website: <https://elections.wi.gov/clerks/recent-communications>.

## **Details**

The Commission unanimously passed the following motions:

1. In light of Executive Order #72 and directives of the Department of Health Services, the Commission finds that Special Voting Deputies are “non-essential” individuals who are not permitted to enter nursing homes and other care facilities without completing a screening process that is not feasible to implement prior to the Spring Election and Presidential Primary. For that election and the May 12, 2020 Special Election in the 7th Congressional District, the Commission directs that municipalities shall not use the Special Voting Deputy process to serve residents in care facilities and instead shall transmit absentee ballots to those voters by mail.
2. In light of Executive Order #72 and directives of the Department of Health Services, the Commission finds that it is impossible or inconvenient for municipalities to conduct Election Day voting at nursing homes and other care facilities, and other facilities as designated by the DHS or other local health officials. The Commission finds that the municipal clerk or municipal elections commission executive director may relocate such polling places without obtaining the prior approval of the local governing body or municipal elections commission.

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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 appointed 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.