

Wisconsin Elections Commission

State of Wisconsin

212 E. Washington Ave., Third Floor ▪ Madison, WI 53703 ▪ elections@wi.gov ▪ (608) 266-8005 ▪ <http://elections.wi.gov>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
September 19, 2016

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:
Reid Magney, 608-267-7887

What Voters Should Know about Registration and Absentee Ballot Mailings

MADISON, WI – As Election Day approaches on November 8, another wave of voter registration and absentee ballot mailings have begun arriving in Wisconsin residents' mailboxes.

The Wisconsin Elections Commission advises voters that their best sources of information about voter registration and absentee voting are their local clerks and MyVote.WI.gov, not mailings from political parties and independent groups. This is especially true given recent changes in some of the election rules resulting from court decisions.

As in previous election years, the Elections Commission and municipal clerks around the state have started receiving questions and complaints about recent direct mailings on voter registration and absentee voting because they contain campaign messages and even errors that could interfere with voting, said Michael Haas, administrator of the Elections Commission.

“Every election we get complaints about these types of mailings,” Haas said. “Interest groups send out glossy mailers to encourage voters to register or apply for an absentee ballot to vote by mail. While these mailings are permissible, our advice to voters is to examine them carefully before relying on them for definitive information about the election. Preferably, voters should rely instead on their local municipal clerk’s office or our MyVote.WI.gov website.”

In late September, the Wisconsin Elections Commission will mail official postcards to 1.2 million state residents who are not registered to vote, giving them information about how to register, said Haas, Wisconsin’s chief elections official.

A continuing problem with unofficial mailers is that some of them contain incorrect information about where to return them. A recent National Rifle Association mailer directs people to return applications to the state, not their municipal clerk, Haas said. In previous years, mailers have urged voters to send their applications to a third-party clearinghouse. In other cases, the mailers tell voters to send it to the wrong municipal clerk.

“Voter registration forms must be delivered to your municipal clerk’s office,” Haas said. “The Elections Commission and municipal clerks will do their best to send misdirected voter registrations and absentee ballot applications to the right place, but there are no guarantees they will arrive in time.”

Another problem with independent mailings is they sometimes make registered voters think they are not registered to vote, Haas said. In recent days, the Commission has begun receiving questions about a mailing from the Voter Participation Center, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit group.

“Independent groups and political parties often use unreliable commercial mailing lists,” Haas said. “The upcoming mailing from the Elections Commission will only go to people who have a Wisconsin driver license or state ID card do not appear to be registered to vote.”

Independent mailings also generate unnecessary work for municipal clerks because some people who are already registered fill out the forms and send them in, Haas said. “Voters can spend two minutes online at MyVote.WI.gov and see whether their registration is current,” he said.

Voters who need to register or change their address should go to MyVote.WI.gov, Wisconsin’s secure voter services website, Haas said. Electors who need to register for the first time, or need to update their voter record, are strongly encouraged to do so as soon as possible and not wait until Election Day.

Using MyVote.WI.gov, people can fill out the registration form online, print it out, sign it and send it to the correct clerk’s address which the website will provide. Voters registering by mail must also send a copy of a proof-of-residence document, such as a driver license, utility bill or bank statement with the voter’s current address.

###

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.