

Government Accountability Board

State of Wisconsin

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In-Person Absentee (Early) Voting Starts Today

MADISON, WI – Wisconsin’s two-week period for in-person absentee voting in the municipal clerk’s office started today, according to the Government Accountability Board.

“We expect to see lines at many municipal clerks’ offices around the state,” said Kevin J. Kennedy, Wisconsin’s chief election official. “One in six ballots cast in November 2012 were early votes in clerks’ offices, and we expect to see similar numbers in 2014.”

Kennedy offered these tips for voters who are thinking of voting early in the clerk’s office:

- Under a new state law, early voting may occur between 8 a.m. and 7 p.m. on weekdays. While some clerks may be open these hours, others in smaller municipalities do not have regular office hours, so voters may need to call their clerk to make an appointment.
- Find your clerk’s location and contact information at MyVote Wisconsin: <http://myvote.wi.gov>.
- Check your municipal clerk’s office hours before going to your city, village or town hall to vote because hours for early voting will vary within the 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. window.
- Clerks are no longer allowed to offer early voting on the weekend.
- Early voting ends at 5 p.m. on Friday, October 31, or at the close of business, whichever is later, but no later than 7 p.m.
- Wisconsin’s voter photo ID law is not in effect for this election due to a recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling, so voters do not have to show photo ID to receive their ballots.
- Remember that early voting happens at municipal clerks’ offices, not county clerks’ offices.
- While you’re at MyVote Wisconsin, make sure your registration is current. If it is not, you can fill out a registration form online, print it, and bring it with you to the clerk’s office to be signed in front of the clerk.
- If you register at the clerk’s office, be sure to bring an acceptable proof of residence document, such as a current driver license or state-issued ID card, recent utility bill or bank statement, a residential lease or property tax bill which contain your current name and address. You can find a list of acceptable documents under “Information about Voting” at the MyVote Wisconsin website.
- Consider waiting for Election Day. The lines may well be shorter, especially if you vote at off-peak times.

“In the November 2012 election, there were 514,398 absentee ballots cast in the clerk’s office, or 16 percent of the total. Because turnout in this gubernatorial election will be smaller than the 2012 presidential election, the total numbers of absentee votes will be smaller, but the percentage will likely be similar,” said Kennedy, director and general counsel of the G.A.B. Historically, turnout at presidential elections in Wisconsin is around 70 percent of eligible voters while gubernatorial election turnout is closer to 50 percent. The G.A.B. has not yet issued a turnout prediction for this election.

As of late Friday, at least 69,028 absentee ballots had been issued by Wisconsin’s local election officials who track them using the Statewide Voter Registration System (SVRS). At this time two years ago, at least 122,000 absentee ballots had been issued. About 45 percent of municipalities track absentee ballots in SVRS, including all the state’s large cities.

Elections Division Administrator Michael Haas reminded voters that the deadline for clerks to receive requests for absentee ballots by mail is Thursday, October 30. Absentee ballots must be postmarked by Election Day, and must be received by the clerk by 4 p.m. the Friday after the election.

Haas noted that there is a popular misperception that absentee ballots are not counted unless an election is close. “Every absentee ballot that has been properly cast will be counted,” Haas said.

Because of the popularity of absentee voting, many political parties, committees and interest groups mail out absentee ballot applications to voters they believe will support their candidates. The G.A.B. and municipal clerks around the state continue to receive complaints about these mailers because they contain political messages. It is legal for groups and candidates to include political messages on absentee ballot application mailers, but a bigger problem is that some mailers may have an incorrect address for the clerk’s office where they need to be returned by the voter, which could delay or prevent a voter from receiving an absentee ballot. Voters who request an absentee ballot using a flier they received in the mail should double check the clerk’s mailing address at <http://myvote.wisconsin.gov>.

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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.