

Government Accountability Board

State of Wisconsin

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G.A.B. Releases 2012 Election Cost Data

MADISON, WI – The Government Accountability Board today released local election cost data for elections held in April, May and June 2012.

At the request of the Legislature, the G.A.B. began last August to collect election cost data from Wisconsin's 72 counties and 1,851 municipalities. Most election costs are borne by local taxpayers.

- The April 3, 2012 Spring Election and Presidential Preference Primary cost local taxpayers \$7.6 million, including \$2.2 million in poll worker wages and \$1.9 million in staff salaries. Ballots cost \$957,000 and election equipment programming cost \$771,000.
- The May 8, 2012 Recall Primary cost local taxpayers \$6.3 million, including \$2.3 million in poll worker wages and \$1.7 million in staff salaries. Ballots cost \$728,000 and programming cost \$617,000.
- The June 5, 2012 Recall Election cost local taxpayers nearly \$7.2 million, including \$2.5 million in poll worker wages and \$1.9 million in staff salaries. Ballots cost \$984,000 and programming cost \$596,000.

For these three elections, clerks reported investing more than \$1 million in for training poll workers: \$655,000 for April, \$161,000 for May and \$250,000 for June.

“Instead of conducting two primaries and two elections this year, Wisconsin election officials will be conducting six elections, which added approximately \$13.5 million in unbudgeted costs,” said Kevin Kennedy, director and general counsel of the G.A.B. “These unplanned elections also put significant stress on Wisconsin’s clerks, who have many other duties beyond elections.”

Elections Division Administrator Nat Robinson cautioned that the cost data has not been audited, and said clerks may have used different methods in arriving at their numbers. Anyone using the data should understand that:

- These figures should not be construed as a complete accounting of audited election-related expenses. The G.A.B. has published instructions on completing the election cost report, but clerks may interpret these instructions and report expenditures differently. In addition, cost data may be incomplete and reflect the information available when the data was reported. While initial reports are due 30 days after an election, municipal and

county clerks have the ability to update their data as more specific information becomes available.

- Election cost data are provided by each municipality and county for each statewide election. G.A.B. staff asked that clerks provide these data based on actual paid invoices or the clerk's best available information rather than estimates (i.e. unpaid invoices, accepted bids, etc.) within the required reporting period. As clerks receive updates, they may revise their reports.
- The cost reporting is part of collecting elections statistics, and is intended to provide a more complete picture of election administration in our state, including the costs of conducting elections. Collecting this data allows the G.A.B to provide detailed reports to the Legislature, the media, voters, and the general public about elections throughout the State of Wisconsin, and will assist municipalities to prepare and budget for elections.

Additionally, processing recall petitions and other preparations for the May and June recall elections by the G.A.B. actually cost the state \$663,000, compared to the original \$975,000 estimate prepared in February 2012. Hiring temporary staff to process the recall petitions was the largest single expense, at just over \$212,000. Data entry services necessary to comply with a court order to search for and strike duplicate signatures and fake names cost \$94,333, and identified 4,001 duplicate signatures and four fictitious names out of 931,053 signatures submitted to recall Governor Walker.

The data in this news release was reported by county and municipal clerks on Form GAB-190 - Election Voting and Registration Statistics Report, which can be found on the agency website: gab.wi.gov/elections-voting/statistics. Cost reporting on GAB-190 began with the April 3, 2012 Spring Election and Presidential Preference Primary. Cost data for the February 21, 2012 Spring Primary is not available. Recall election cost estimates prepared at the request of the Legislature are available here: gab.wi.gov/publications/other/2012-recall-expense-estimates.

Election cost data for the August 14 Partisan Primary is due from county and municipal clerks this week, and should be available to the public in several weeks.

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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.