



To: Wisconsin Elections Commission Members
From: Robert Kellerman, WAAN Chair
Date: May 19, 2020
Re: Support for Recommendations in the Absentee Ballot Report for April 7 Spring Election and Presidential Preference Primary

The **Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network** is a collaborative group of individuals and associations working with and for Wisconsin's older adults to shape public policy to improve their quality of life.

Core member organizations:

Aging and Disability Professionals Association of Wisconsin (*ADPAW*)

Alzheimer's Association Wisconsin Chapter

Wisconsin Adult Day Services Association (*WADSA*)

Wisconsin Association of Area Agencies on Aging (*W4A*)

Wisconsin Association of Benefit Specialists (*WABS*)

Wisconsin Association of Nutrition Directors (*WAND*)

Wisconsin Association of Senior Centers (*WASC*)

Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging (*WIHA*)

Wisconsin Senior Corps Association (*WISCA*)

Wisconsin Tribal Aging Unit Association

Absentee voting provides many older adults (and voters of all ages) an important alternative to voting at the polls. Concerns regarding the spread of COVID-19 led significantly more older adults and voters of all ages to access the absentee voting process. Further increases in the absentee voting rate are likely for the fall election and beyond, as older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions and are at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19 opt to reduce their risk of exposure by voting absentee.

The Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network applauds the WEC staff, Wisconsin clerks, and the U.S. Postal Service (U.S.P.S.) for their tireless efforts to overcome the countless challenges posed by the high volume of absentee voters in the spring election. Despite the very short amount of time to plan and prepare for the many challenges encountered, most voters using the absentee voting process were able to do so successfully. Additionally, WAAN appreciates the commitment of the WEC staff, Wisconsin Clerks, and the U.S.P.S. to identify areas for improvement and begin work immediately to create a simpler absentee ballot process and improved communication.

The recommendations and proposed course of action included in the Absentee Ballot Report for April 7 Spring Election and Presidential Preference Primary are supported by WAAN. The following recommendations are of specific significance to WAAN and are strongly supported:

IV. Recommendations: Proposed Courses of Action

- A. Assessment Resources – **Additional efforts to engage first-time absentee voters to test new or updated products such as the absentee ballot request form.** WAAN believes the involvement of voters in the testing of these new products will lead to increased user-friendliness of the products and decreased confusion among voters.
- B. Ballot Request Process – **Improvements to the process of requesting an absentee ballot – revising the paper Absentee Ballot form (EL-122) to be more user-friendly, exploring the opportunity to mail the request form to every registered voter without a current absentee ballot request on file for 2020, additional directions on how to provide a copy of valid photo ID (including with the mailing of the request form), and improvements to the photo ID upload and confirmation of submission process on MyVote.** WAAN received comments from some older adults who had difficulty requesting an absentee ballot as some did not have internet access and were unsure of what to send to request the form and some did not know where to send the request. Many older absentee voters found the requirement to provide a copy of their valid photo ID challenging due to difficulties in uploading it online, lack of scanners/copiers in their homes, and limited or no access to public places where copies could be made. Additional instructions regarding photo ID copies would provide some much-needed clarity.

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C. Mailing Process and Ballot Tracking – **Integration of USPS Intelligent Mail Barcodes to enable scanning and tracking absentee ballots as they travel through the USPS system.** Some older voters requested absentee ballots but did not receive them in time to vote by absentee ballot. Some older voters mailed their absentee ballots back but were unsure whether they were ever received. The ability to track the current location and projected arrival of the ballots will increase voter confidence and decrease unnecessary calls to the clerks' offices.

D. Reports and Audit Tools – **Train clerk staff on best-practices for managing high volumes of absentee ballot requests...and create reports to help clerks manage and audit absentee ballot requests and ballots coming into and leaving their office so that they identify issues, anomalies, and ensure all requests are successfully fulfilled and tracked.** Early identification and resolution of issues will allow for new issues to be more quickly addressed and improved reporting will help clerks better track requests and ballots which will not only improve their process but also help with communication with local residents.

The absentee voting process, though used by many, remains a challenge for some citizens of all voting ages (particularly those who lack access to Wi-Fi, computers, and smart phones or those who are less tech savvy). The recommendations proposed in the report will improve access to the absentee voting process for more voters and will help Wisconsin clerks to better manage the growing number of absentee voters.

WAAN is a collaborative group of 10 statewide associations and numerous individuals working with and for Wisconsin's older adults to shape public policy to improve their quality of life.