

WISCONSIN STATE
LEGISLATURE
COMMITTEE HEARING
RECORDS

2003-04

(session year)

Assembly

(Assembly, Senate or Joint)

Committee on
Campaigns &
Elections
(AC-CE)

File Naming Example:

Record of Comm. Proceedings ... RCP

- > 05hr_AC-Ed_RCP_pt01a
- > 05hr_AC-Ed_RCP_pt01b
- > 05hr_AC-Ed_RCP_pt02

Published Documents

> Committee Hearings ... CH (Public Hearing Announcements)

> **

> Committee Reports ... CR

> **

> Executive Sessions ... ES

> **

> Record of Comm. Proceedings ... RCP

> **

*Information Collected For Or
Against Proposal*

> Appointments ... Appt

> **

> Clearinghouse Rules ... CRule

**

> Hearing Records ... HR (bills and resolutions)

> **03hr_ab0249_AC-CE_pt01**

> Miscellaneous ... Misc

> **



WISCONSIN COUNTY CLERKS ASSOCIATION

April 16, 2003

Representative Freese, Chair
Members of the Campaign & Elections Committee

The Wisconsin County Clerks would favor returning to specifying a reason to vote by absentee ballot.

At the last presidential election and governor's election, municipal clerks were on overload with the amount of people requesting absentees and those people standing in line at their counter wanting to vote by absentee ballot. The process is very time consuming and requires alot of staff time to accomodate voters.

The increase in absentee voting also links to an increase in the amount of time that it would take to do a Recount. Each absentee envelope must be examined by the Board of Canvass and verified.

The increase was noted by the City of Janesville as follows for November Elections:

1998- 1,054

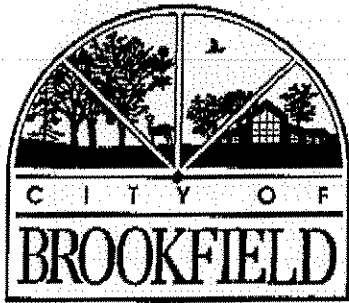
2000- 1,947

2002- 1,853

As you can see there was a definite increase after the law was changed. It is also more time consuming for the poll worker on election night. None of us want to infringe on anyone's right to vote, but it should be important enough to take the time to go to the polls if you are able.

The other issue is, if an absentee ballot is improperly voted, the elector has no recourse. With marksense machines, the ballot would be returned for overvoting or undervoting. If the absentee is overvoted or undervoted, the elector has lost his/her vote. -

Kay S. O'Connell
Kay S. O'Connell
Rock County Clerk
WCCA President

**OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK***Kris Schmidt, City Clerk*

2000 North Calhoun Road

Brookfield, Wisconsin 53005-5095

(262) 782-9650 Fax (262) 796-6671

Rep. Glenn Grothmann
Wisconsin State Legislature
Sent By Fax 608-282-3658

April 16, 2003

Dear Representative Grothman.

I was pleased to see your proposed bill being introduced. I have been a City Clerk since 1995 for the City of Brookfield. I appreciate our progressive tradition in allowing people to register at the polls on election day even though it creates substantial work for my staff and poll workers.

The expansion of the absentee requirements to allow all voters to receive an absentee ballot has been problematic. My part time staff was required to go to full time hours in order to get out the increase in absentee ballot requests. The cost of the labor, materials and postage is another unfunded mandate from the state.

Not only does it take more staff time to process, it also takes pollworkers additional time to process at the polls. In November of 1998, 1,160 voters cast absentee ballots. The voter turnout was 69%. In November of 2002, 1,485 voters cast absentee ballots. The voter turnout was 67%. The more permissive rules for acquiring an absentee ballot did not increase the voter turnout. In November of 1996, 1,854 voters cast absentee ballots and the turnout was about 79%. In November of 2000, 3001 voters cast absentee ballots and the turnout was just under 90%. I believe similar situations occurred throughout the State.

I have a large number of elderly in my City as well as a large number of snow birds therefore I tend to have more absentees than normal. What I find to be so problematic is that many people will vote absentee as a convenience only. I staff my polling sites with sufficient poll workers to insure that lines are kept to a minimum therefore in most situations it probably takes more time to walk into the polling place than it does inside the polling place.

Every election day I travel to all of my polling places and see people who struggle to walk into a polling place due to physical weakness. All of my polling places are handicapped accessible. Often I stop those voters and suggest that an absentee ballot can be obtained from my office. More times than not, the person says that as long as they can manage to get to the polling place they will do so. Those are the people for whom a permanent absentee ballot was created. As an aside, they are also the people who vote regularly.

Thank you for your efforts. I hope my few comments are helpful to your deliberations. I would be happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely yours,





Shorewood

April 16, 2003

Rep. Grothman,

I am in favor of Assembly Bill 249, whereby residents would need a reason to vote absentee.

More and more people are currently using absentee balloting because they do not feel like waiting in line or being inconvenienced of having to vote on a certain day when they might want to plan other activities. Voting absentee is also more costly for the municipalities in that we have to pay for the mailing and affidavit envelopes, the instruction sheet and the postage.

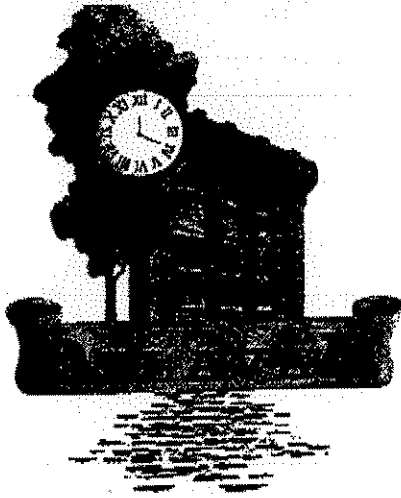
In this time of budget constraints, your bill would save municipalities money that would otherwise have to be spent on absentee election materials and postage.

Sincerely,

Kathleen E. Greig, CMC
Village Clerk

414-847-2608

kgreig@villageofshorewood.org



P.O. Box 465
123 South Second St.
Delavan, Wisconsin 53115
262-728-5585
Fax: 262-728-4566
www.cityofdelavan.org

April 16, 2003

Dear Rep. Grothman
608-282-3658

I would encourage you to pass Assembly Bill 249 which requires citizens to have a reason to vote by absentee ballot in the State of Wisconsin. I believe this bill will reduce potential voter fraud, and will alleviate the expense to Municipalities for unneeded absentee ballots.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,

Susan Kitzman
City Clerk

**MARILYN H. MERTEN, COUNTY CLERK**

432 E. Washington Street, P.O. Box 1986
West Bend, WI 53095-7986
Phone: (262) 335-4301 Fax: (262) 306-2208
Email: clkmarilyn@co.washington.wi.us

TO: Assembly Campaigns and Elections Committee
Rep. Stephen J. Freese, Chairperson
Rep. Mark Gundrum, Vice-Chairperson
Rep. Glenn Grothman
Rep. Jeffrey Wood
Rep. David Travis
Rep. Mark Pocan

FROM: Marilyn H. Merten, County Clerk *mhm*
Legislation Chair, WCCA

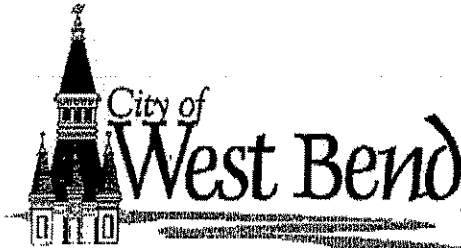
RE: AB-249

DATE: April 16, 2003

On behalf of the Wisconsin County Clerks Association, I wish to notify you that WCCA supports AB-249. The WCCA supports the right to vote by all citizens via absentee ballots when they are unable to go to the polling place to vote on an election day, including using technological advances to assure timely receipt of ballots while assuring the integrity of the election process. Our association is concerned about what could now virtually become election by mail. I believe it is an elector's responsibility to put forth some effort for their right to vote.

In addition, the current process is causing more difficulty at the local municipal polling place, whereby, processing absentee ballots is a lot of work for the municipal clerk. Our voting system also provides for accuracy in the elector casting their ballot. Should someone incorrectly mark their ballot or overvote their ballot, the electronic voting machine will caution the voter before casting their ballot. There is more chance for error through absentee voting. We want ballots to count on election day.

Absentee voting has a purpose. It is for the elector who will be absent from their polling district or unable to go to the polls on the day of election during the hours that the polls are open. That is what AB-249 provides for and should be supported by the Campaigns and Election Committee and enacted by the Legislature. I urge your support of AB-249.



OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK
(262)335-5103

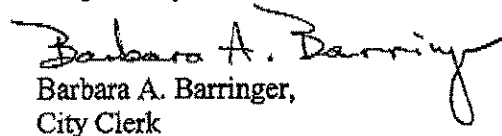
April 16, 2003

Rep. Glenn Grothman

Re: AB249

I want to thank you for presenting AB 249 requiring a reason to absentee vote. This helps in reducing the number of absentee requests and chances of election fraud.

Respectfully,


Barbara A. Barringer,
City Clerk



April 17, 2003

REP. GLENN GROTHMAN
59TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT
ROOM 15 NORTH
STATE CAPITOL
P O BOX 8952
MADISON WI 53708

Dear Rep. Grothman:

I am in favor of the change back to the way it was a few years ago when people needed a reason to vote absentee. We have had so many requests from people for absentee ballots who really didn't know they were requesting one (a big push by each party and special interest groups). Then, when they received a ballot, they either ignored it or got angry with us for sending them one, since they ALWAYS vote at the voting poll.

Yours very truly,

PAT LOHSE, CMC

City of Sheboygan
plohse@ci.sheboygan.wi.us
920-459-3364
fax 920-459-3967
Population: 50,792

CITY CLERK'S OFFICE

CITY HALL
828 CENTER AVE.
SHEBOYGAN, WI
53081-4496

920/459-3361
FAX 920/459-3967



CITY OF LODI
113 S. Main Street
Lodi, Wisconsin 53555-1120
Tel: (608) 592-3247
Fax: (608) 592-3271

April 17, 2003

Representative Glenn Grothman
PO Box 8952
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Representative Grothman,

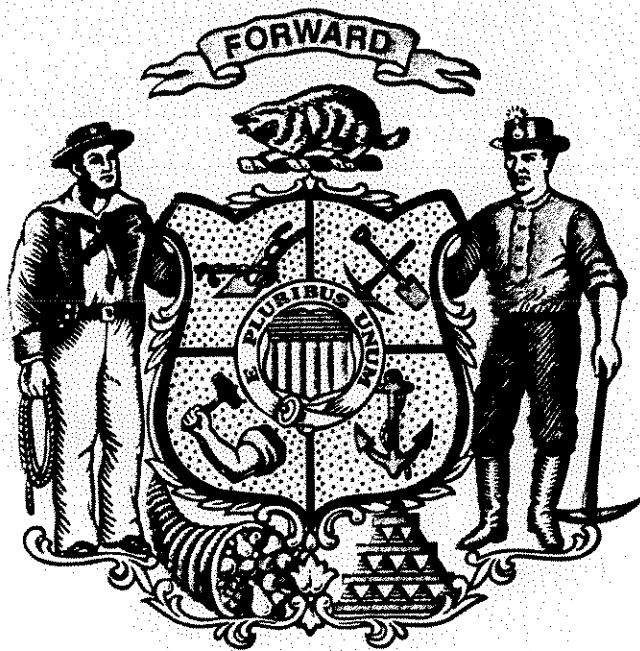
I am writing to you regarding your bill AB249. Please work hard for all of the municipal clerks of this state and put the reasons for requesting an absentee ballot back to what it was two years ago. Currently, it is difficult for us clerks to verify names and addresses which goes against the whole idea of voter fraud. Outside of the fact that the change in the law put an additional burden on the budget of our municipalities, it also burdens us with a nightmare of record-keeping much of which is just plain wasted time. The current law also ignores the fact that voting is a privilege in this country for which every citizen needs to acknowledge and uphold. Allowing people to vote from the comfort of their homes without good reason is spoon-feeding the population.

Keep up the good work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Adele M. Van Ness". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Adele M. Van Ness
Clerk, City of Lodi



Griffiths, Terri

From: Richard, Rob
Sent: Thursday, April 17, 2003 10:20 AM
To: Griffiths, Terri
Subject: FW: AB 249 /absentee voting

-----Original Message-----

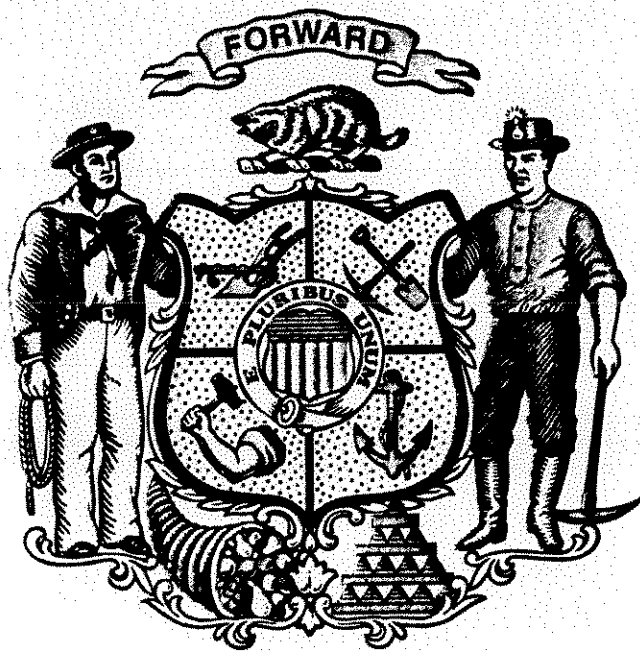
From: Dennis Boyer [mailto:dennisb@chorus.net]
Sent: Thursday, April 17, 2003 4:19 AM
To: Rep.Freese@legis.state.wi.us
Subject: AB 249 /absentee voting

Dear Rep. Freese: We feel that AB 249 takes us in the wrong direction in terms of ease of voting. Today's hectic schedules, combined with job and family pressures, make voting difficult for many people. Those with long days and last minute travel assignments often find that they cannot make it to the polls during those limited hours. There are also people with medical situations short of long term care that merit consideration.

I urge the committee to move toward additional access, like longer polling hours, weekend voting, and even postcard voting. We respectfully request that your committee reject the AB 249 approach.

Sincerely

Dennis Boyer



WISCONSIN CITIZEN ACTION



opeiv9j
la

152 West Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 308 • Milwaukee, WI 53203 • 414/272-2562 • 414/274-3494 (fax) • info@wi-citizenaction.org • www.wi-citizenaction.org

Assembly Campaigns and Elections Committee

AB 249

April 16, 2003

Carolyn Castore
Wisconsin Citizen Action

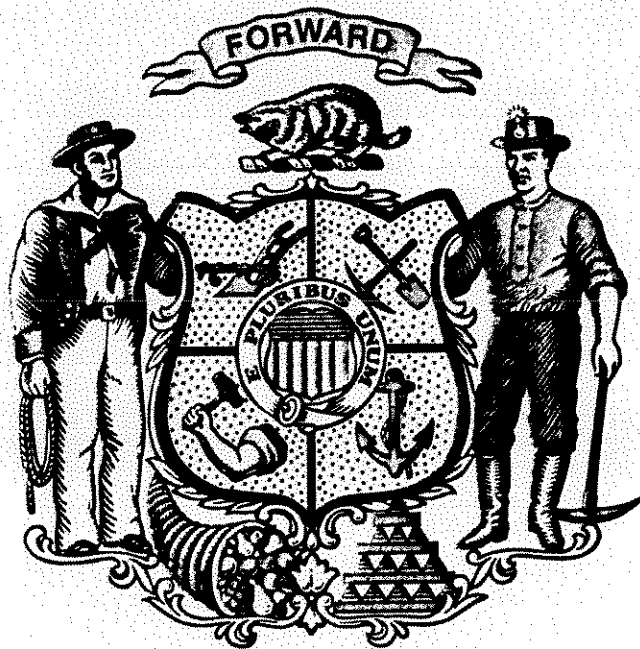
Thank you for the opportunity to testify today to represent the views of Wisconsin Citizen Action. WCA is the state's largest public interest organization. We have over 74,000 members statewide and 210-dues-paying affiliate organizations from labor, community, senior citizen, faith, environmental, family farm and other organizations.

Wisconsin Citizen Action opposes AB 249. At a point where we are seeking to increase citizen involvement through voting and when cynicism about a citizen's impact on legislative actions is increasing, passing legislation that would create a barrier to voting makes no sense.

Wisconsin has a proud tradition of being a high voter participation state. As you know, Wisconsin ranked third in the nation in voter turnout on November 7th with 66% of eligible voters going to the polls, as compared to 53% nationally. Wisconsin's turnout also marked an 8.6% increase over 1996, the sharpest rise of any state in the nation. We believe we need to build on this tradition of increasing voter participation while also reducing the opportunity for fraud.

Absentee voting is a necessity for some and a benefit for others. We support efforts to reduce the opportunity for fraud by limiting where absentee ballots can be mailed. However, this bill goes much farther. Simply by having to state a reason for why an absentee ballot is needed is a barrier to voting.

Voting is a right, not a privilege. The legislature should be examining ways to encourage greater civic participation through voting. It should also be working to streamline the elections process and ensure that poll workers are well trained. At the time when Wisconsin is working to implement the Help America Vote Act, the legislature should not be focused on legislation that would Keep Wisconsinites From Voting.



**MARILYN H. MERTEN, COUNTY CLERK**

432 E. Washington Street, P.O. Box 1986
West Bend, WI 53095-7986
Phone: (262) 335-4301 Fax: (262) 306-2208
Email: clkmarilyn@co.washington.wi.us

TO: Assembly Campaigns and Elections Committee
Rep. Stephen J. Freese, Chairperson
Rep. Mark Gundrum, Vice-Chairperson
Rep. Glenn Grothman
Rep. Jeffrey Wood
Rep. David Travis
Rep. Mark Pocan

FROM: Marilyn H. Merten, County Clerk *mhm*
Legislation Chair, WCCA

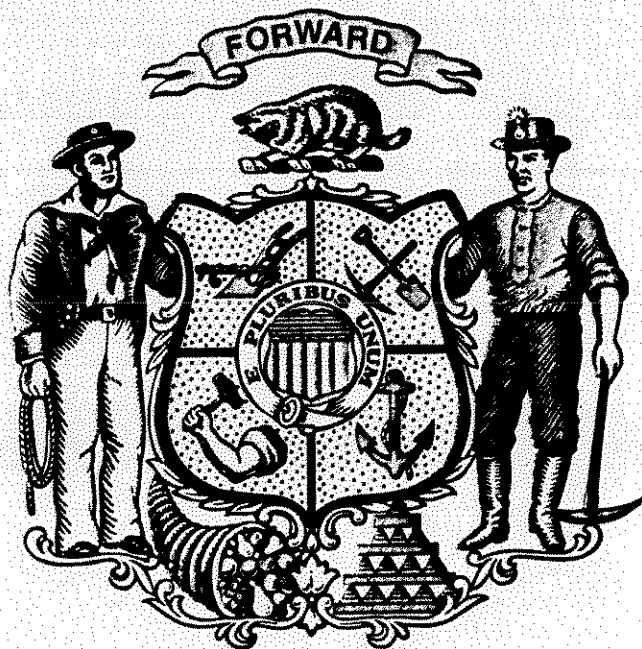
RE: AB-249

DATE: April 16, 2003

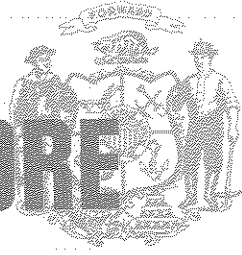
On behalf of the Wisconsin County Clerks Association, I wish to notify you that WCCA supports AB-249. The WCCA supports the right to vote by all citizens via absentee ballots when they are **unable** to go to the polling place to vote on an election day, including using technological advances to assure timely receipt of ballots while assuring the integrity of the election process. Our association is concerned about what could now virtually become election by mail. I believe it is an elector's responsibility to put forth some effort for their right to vote.

In addition, the current process is causing more difficulty at the local municipal polling place, whereby, processing absentee ballots is a lot of work for the municipal clerk. Our voting system also provides for accuracy in the elector casting their ballot. Should someone incorrectly mark their ballot or overvote their ballot, the electronic voting machine will caution the voter before casting their ballot. There is more chance for error through absentee voting. We want ballots to count on election day.

Absentee voting has a purpose. It is for the elector who will be absent from their polling district or unable to go to the polls on the day of election during the hours that the polls are open. That is what AB-249 provides for and should be supported by the Campaigns and Election Committee and enacted by the Legislature. I urge your support of AB-249.



State Senator GWENDOLYNNE MOORE



Capitol Office:
P. O. Box 7882, Madison, WI 53707-7882
Phone: (608) 266-5810 Fax: (608) 267-2353
District Telephone: (414) 442-3080
Toll-free Legislative Hotline: 1-800-362-9472
E-Mail: sen.moore@legis.state.wi.us
Member: Joint Finance Committee
Board Member: Wisconsin Housing and
Economic Development Authority

April 17, 2003

Testimony of State Senator Gwendolynne Moore on Assembly Bill 249 Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony regarding Assembly Bill 249, as it seeks to repeal 1999 Act 182 by reestablishing past requirements that absentee ballots be solely accessible to those who are unable to come to the polls due to absence from their municipality the day of the election or due to age, sickness, handicap, physical disability, jury duty service as an election official or religious reasons.

Prior to 1999, in order to receive an absentee ballot, a voter was required to meet one of the following specifications as to why he/she was unable to vote at the polls on the day of the election:

- 1) Expected absence from their municipality the day of the election;
- 2) Active Service in the U.S. armed forces;
- 3) Due to age, sickness, handicap, physical disability, jury duty service as an elected official or religious reasons cannot appear at the polling place.

1999 Act 182 deleted these restrictions by allowing any qualified elector to use an absentee ballot to vote. Currently, an absentee voter is not required to give any reason as to why he/she is unable or unwilling to vote at the polls in order to qualify to absentee vote.

There is nothing fraudulent or wrong with increasing voter turnout by encouraging people to vote, even if they do so before the election.

During the 1999-2000 session, the Legislature voted in a bipartisan fashion to change Wisconsin's election laws to allow a person to vote absentee if that person is unable to go to the polls for any reason. All six of the members sitting on the Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections, unanimously voted in favor of this change in 1999. During the 2000 election, the Reverend Jesse Jackson utilized the progressive changes made by that law and took busloads of young people who might not have otherwise voted in Racine, Kenosha and Milwaukee to their respective municipal clerk's office to vote by absentee ballot in the 2000 Presidential race.

Republicans, including AB 249's author Rep. Grothman, who voted in favor of this change several sessions ago have repeatedly attempted to reinstate absentee restrictions, proposing to do away with the current system and reserve absentee ballots for only those who can prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that they are unable to be at the polls on voting day. While the elimination of the restrictions on absentee ballot voting did not result in voter fraud, it was used in "Get Out the Vote" efforts led by Democrats and it did result in greater numbers of people voting absentee in the 2000 and 2002

elections than in election years prior to the absentee ballot change. AB 249 does not address current voter fraud accusations. No changes proposed in this absentee ballot bill would have prevented the misuse of the absentee ballot by the ACE group recently identified in a several Journal Sentinel articles. However, Assembly Bill 172, authored by Rep. Krug and myself does address absentee vote concerns. With the success of the law change in increasing turnout, there is no reason to impose additional restrictions on Wisconsin's voters.

Wisconsin has a long and proud history of fair, inclusive elections. I ask that you fight to preserve our progressive open election laws and promote changes that increase voter turnout and access to the ballot; please oppose Assembly Bill 249, which seeks to limit access to the absentee ballot. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share my views on AB 249.