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41ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

AB 91: Communications by Members of the Legislature
Testimony of State Representative Joan Ballweg
Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections
October 9, 2013

Thank you, Chair Bernier and members of the Campaigns and Elections Committee for hearing Assembly Bill 91 today. AB 91 creates exceptions for communications by members of the Legislature during a state of emergency. This would apply during the time of the biennium between the first day for circulation of nomination papers and the date of the general election, when distribution of 50 or more pieces of substantially identical materials is prohibited.

Assembly Bill 91 allows a legislator to send state-sponsored communications during the 45-day period following the declaration of a state of emergency by the governor affecting any county in their own district if the communication relates solely to the subject of the emergency. An example would be sending out an e-update with information related to County Emergency Management or FEMA contacts, information, or meeting notices.

Assembly Bill 91 was passed by the Assembly two years ago. Sponsored in the 2011-12 session by Rep. Barbara Toles, 2011 AB 32 was passed by this same committee in August, 2011, and passed the Assembly in September of 2011 on a 91 to 6 vote. Unfortunately, this common sense legislation sat in the Senate committee, failed to pass, and died pursuant to Senate Joint Resolution 1.

It is my hope that this session we are able to see this important bill through the whole process. In cases of emergency, which unfortunately seems to happen too often in our world, this bill will allow our elected officials to continue to do their job by passing along important and time-sensitive information to their own constituents regardless of the time of year.

Thank you for your time today. I'm happy to answer any questions at this time.



PAUL FARROW

STATE SENATOR

October 9, 2013

Chairwoman Bernier and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of AB 91. Currently, publicly funded distributions of substantially identical material such as newsletters and office updates are limited to less than 50 pieces beginning on the first day for circulation of nomination papers and lasting until election day.

This legislation is presented to allow for communication by a member of the legislature to exceed this limit when a state of emergency is declared by the governor. The state of emergency must affect a county within the district and communications are to relate solely to the subject of the emergency.

Each year, a number of natural disasters, from floods to fires to tornados, occur around Wisconsin. An emergency exemption to the current "50-piece" restriction of legislative communications during the campaign period allows elected officials to disseminate important and time sensitive information to their constituents in the event of a crisis.

I am asking for your support today to promote increased public safety and swift communication of important information in times of emergency.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

SERVING WISCONSIN'S 33RD SENATE DISTRICT

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Testimony of Kevin J. Kennedy
Director and General Counsel
Wisconsin Government Accountability Board

Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections

October 9, 2013

Room 328 Northwest, State Capitol

Public Hearing

2013 Assembly Bills 54, 91, 393 and 394

Chairperson Bernier and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today. Before I begin, I would like to draw your attention to an email sent to Committee Members today at my request about recent trends in voting equipment. As our current optical scan voting equipment rapidly approaches obsolescence, we believe it is imperative for Committee Members to understand the changing dynamics of vote tabulation. The email also contains correspondence originally sent to Committee members on May 31, 2013 describing election law changes that our local election officials have requested. I have attached a copy to my testimony.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the three bills before you today. I am appearing here for information purposes and to answer any questions you or Committee members may have. The Government Accountability Board is not taking a position for or against any of these bills.

Assembly Bill 54

This legislation has been promoted as a means to ensure all voters in the state, no matter where they reside, have the same opportunity to cast an absentee ballot in-person. It does not address the disparate treatment and limited in-person absentee voting options provided in smaller municipalities. The bill merely creates a window in which Wisconsin's 1,852 municipalities may pick and choose what hours to be open.

While large municipalities with diverse populations such as Milwaukee and Madison will be constrained from serving voters who find it difficult to get to City Hall Monday through Friday between 7:30 am and 6:00 pm, small municipalities can continue to limit their hours to as little as an hour a day or close their offices for several days during the 10 days available for in-person absentee voting. While Milwaukee had expanded in-person absentee voting hours to serve the 36,349 voters who came to cast a vote in-person at City Hall, the City of Platteville clerk's office is closed on Fridays. It was open the Friday before the November 6, 2012 election. In many municipalities the only way to cast an absentee vote in-person is to track down the municipal clerk and make an appointment because there are no regular office hours.

The proposed legislation is trying to balance competing interests. While trying to bring a level of uniformity to the absentee voting process, it also seeks to preserve local control for municipalities to best serve its citizens. The purpose of in-person absentee voting is to provide a means for citizens who have difficulty getting to the polls on Election Day to cast their ballot in a secure and public manner.

I recommend that the Committee consider expanding the window to permit in-person absentee voting between 7:00 am and 8:00 pm, the same hours the polls are open on Election Day. This provides up to 13 hours of in-person absentee voting on 10 business days. In addition, municipalities should be able to provide in-person absentee voting on the weekend between the two weeks preceding the election. This provides all municipalities with the flexibility to serve the diverse range of voters with the opportunity to cast an in-person absentee ballot while providing a standard window for casting absentee ballots.

The proposed legislation also presents some local control issues by limiting appointments for absentee voting outside the proposed 10 and a half hour, 10 business day window created by the

bill. The bill provides that an appointment may only be made with the clerk, not a member of the clerk's staff. This limitation puts an undue burden on a single person and does not account for the scenarios where a clerk may be unavailable due to outside commitments, family matters or illness or a vacancy in the clerk's office. If the Committee adopts the proposed change I have suggested with up to 13 hours of voting over 12 days, the need for appointments outside this window is diminished.

The bill also removes the appointment process in Milwaukee from the Election Commission and places it with the city clerk who does not have any current statutory election-related responsibilities.

Assembly Bill 91

This proposed legislation adds another exception to the limit on using state resources to communicate to constituents during the campaign season. This exception permits using state resources to reach out to constituents during the campaign black-out period for the 45 days following a declaration of emergency by the Governor.

Assembly Bill 393

This bill would allow municipal clerks to appoint election inspectors who live within their county, instead of limiting them to municipal residents. This would be a departure from having purely local election workers at the municipal level, but it would also provide flexibility to clerks who may have difficulty finding sufficient numbers of local poll workers. However, some municipal clerks have expressed concern about losing the ability to appoint highly-qualified local residents as poll workers if one or both political parties submitted first-choice nominees from elsewhere in the county.

Assembly Bill 394

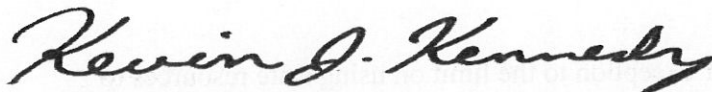
This bill would require uniform labeling of duplicate ballots in the upper right-hand corner of the ballot. We are concerned that writing in this area could interfere with the scanning of the codes for timing and security printed in that area on optical-scan ballots, which comprise 90 percent of the ballots cast in Wisconsin. We suggest duplicate ballots be labeled as such in the

endorsement area of the ballot, which will not interfere with ballot markings for security and timing. 2013 Senate Bill 262, which passed the Senate yesterday, contained this change.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you. I hope this testimony will help inform the Legislature's consideration of these bills. As always, we are available to answer questions and work with you in developing proposed legislation.

Respectfully submitted,



Kevin J. Kennedy

Director and General Counsel

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JUDGE TIMOTHY L. VOCKE
Chair

KEVIN J. KENNEDY
Director and General Counsel

May 31, 2013

The Honorable Kathleen Bernier, Chair
Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections
Room 107 West, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53708

Subject: LRB-1763

Dear Representative Bernier and Committee Members:

The staff of the Government Accountability Board is currently reviewing the draft legislation circulated by Representative Stone as LRB-1763. Given that the proposed legislation would affect many statutes governing election administration, I would like to forward several legislative recommendations recently adopted by our Board and that we would request be considered for inclusion in any comprehensive revision of the election-related bill.

Beginning in the fall of 2012, the Board convened a Clerks Concerns Taskforce, at the request of county and municipal clerks. The purpose of the Taskforce was to review concerns raised by local election officials that the tasks required for administering elections has become too cumbersome and complicated, straining the resources of counties and municipalities as well as causing many local clerks and election inspectors to terminate their service. The Taskforce submitted various recommendations for administrative and legislative changes to our Board, which have been considered in two public meetings of the Board, and a number of those recommendations have been adopted by the Board.

The Board has directed its staff to communicate the recommendations it adopted and which require statutory revisions to the Legislature. The Government Accountability Board respectfully requests that the Legislature consider including the following legislative amendments as part of LRB-1763 or any other set of election-related bills in this session:

Absentee Voting Procedures

1. Permit electronic transmission of ballots to all absentee voters who are overseas, including voters who are overseas temporarily, if electronic transmission is requested by the voter.
2. Standardize the deadline for by-mail absentee ballot requests by moving the deadline for both military and indefinitely confined voters to request an absentee ballot by mail from the Friday before the election to the Thursday before the election, and by moving the Election Day deadline for active military voters to request an absentee ballot for a federal election to the Thursday before the election.

3. Require all absentee ballots to be physically returned by 8:00 p.m. on Election Day, instead of by 4:00 p.m. on the Friday after the election.
4. Eliminate the requirement that the witness signature on absentee ballot certificate envelopes be executed by a U.S. citizen.
5. The Clerks Concerns Taskforce also recommended that, for as long as the voter photo ID requirement is not in effect, the deadline for voters to validate their provisional ballot should be moved from 4:00 p.m. on the Friday after the election to 4:00 p.m. on the Wednesday after the election. If the voter ID requirement is in effect, the Taskforce recommended that deadline for validating provisional ballots should remain as 4:00 p.m. on Friday after the election. The Board directed staff to refer this Taskforce recommendation to the Legislature for its consideration without taking a position on the merits of the proposal.

Four-Year Voter Record Maintenance

The Board directed staff to communicate to the Legislature that the Board does not object to completing the Four-Year Voter Record Maintenance on behalf of municipal clerks, but that the Board wishes to have clear express authority stated in the statutes, along with necessary funding.

Annexations

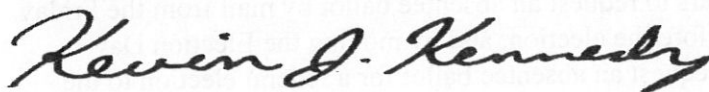
In order to facilitate accurate mapping of voting district boundaries and properly assign electors to voting wards, add the Government Accountability Board to the list of agencies that the Secretary of State is required to notify under Wis. Stat. § 66.0217(9)(b).

Public Records

The Clerks Concerns Taskforce also recommended that voted ballots should not be subject to public inspection under the Public Records Law, but that providing copies of ballots would remain permitted. The Board directed staff to refer this recommendation to the Legislature for its consideration without taking a position on the merits of the proposal.

The Board believes the recommendations described above are primarily administrative in nature, and they would result in simpler and more consistent procedures to be implemented by local election officials. Training of clerks and election inspectors would be simplified, and the proposed changes would address some of the workload concerns that have been expressed by local election officials. I would be glad to work with you and other legislators to develop these statutory changes, or to answer any questions regarding the background and reasoning related to these recommendations. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Government Accountability Board



Kevin J. Kennedy
Director and General Counsel

October 9, 2013

To the Members of the Assembly Campaigns and Elections Committee
Representative Kathy Bernier, Chairman

I support AB 54 as amended.

Wisconsin Statute 6.869 states: "The Board shall prescribe uniform instructions for municipalities to provide to absentee electors".

When rules are uniform, participants of a process feel the process is fair.

AB 54 provides those uniform instructions directing all Wisconsin municipalities—large and small—to provide uniform days and hours for in-person absentee voting. The bill provides for 2 weeks of in-person absentee voting and defines the days—Monday through Friday—and times—7:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m.--when the voting may take place.

This is very similar to the uniform hours of voting allowed on Election Day—7:00 a.m.to 8:00 p.m. on a specific day. All polls uniformly open and close at the same time throughout the state.

Another option open to all voters, if for some reason they cannot vote during in-person absentee or on Election Day, is to request a by-mail absentee ballot. The choice of day and time of voting is then at the voters convenience. There are rules governing when those absentee ballots must be returned.

AB 91: Support.

AB 393: I support this bill because it enlarges the pool of willing, available citizen poll workers and will allow more citizens who want to be poll workers to do so.

- Some municipalities within a county have difficulty finding enough resident poll works to staff their polls but other municipalities in the county may have more volunteers than they can use. This bill provides more opportunities to serve where needed.
- Wisconsin statutes (s. 7.30 (4) (b) specify a partisan responsibility for the two majority political parties to provide member nominees to be poll workers. Political makeup of municipalities is not always equally balanced. Allowing partisan poll workers to be assigned within their county of residence would assist in providing that check and balance designed in the law of equal numbers of members of the two parties working together to conduct our elections.
- Some municipalities within a county need poll workers with language abilities but are unable to recruit enough resident poll works to meet this need. Again, the bill allows for consideration of a larger pool of poll worker volunteers.
- All poll workers are trained by and accountable to the clerk under whom they will work. As Wisconsin election law requires uniform administration of all our elections, all poll workers are trained under that uniform process to conduct elections . The municipal clerk and the chief inspector of the polling place retain all authority and responsibility for the conduct of the poll workers regardless of the specific residence of a poll worker.

AB 394: I support. The bill details a uniform process that will provide easy identification of ballots that poll workers are required to remake in order to enable machine tabulation. Requiring a serial number and a specific location on the ballot for that number and the reason for the re-make of that ballot will assist the post-election audit process as well as potentially the post-election canvass process.

Mary Ann Hanson
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