



WISCONSIN STATE SENATE

DAN KNODL

STATE SENATOR • 8TH DISTRICT

Senate Bill 408

Public Testimony

Senate Committee on Shared Revenue, Elections, and Consumer Protection

September 26, 2023

Thank you members of the committee for being here today.

Our “50-piece rule” serves an important role in keeping official legislative correspondence and campaign communications clear and separate. In doing so, we prevent the use of taxpayer dollars from inadvertently influencing election outcomes. Currently, the rule takes effect on April 15th, the start date for circulation of nomination papers. Unfortunately, this creates unintended consequences that prevent legislators from fully serving their constituents. Senate Bill 408 seeks to reform the rule to address these concerns while preserving the intent of the 50-piece rule.

First, it provides senators and representatives with adequate time to provide constituents with communications following the close of the legislative session. This bill moves the rule’s effective date from April 15th to June 1st, the final day of nomination paper circulation. That will give adequate time for the creation and distribution of “session recap” materials to constituents.

Second, it reflects the fact that state senators represent three times as many constituents as state representatives by lifting the limit for senators from 50 to 150 pieces of identical materials.

Third, it provides for the limited suspension of the rule during states of emergency. This provision would have been very helpful during the COVID-19 pandemic, but going forward it will also help legislators serve their constituents during local emergencies. Since late spring and early summer are the peak season for severe weather in Wisconsin, it is prudent to allow for official legislative communications during these limited circumstances.

I’d like to thank Representative Steffen for his work on this bill, as well as the bill’s bipartisan co-sponsors.

Thank you for your time, and I would be happy to answer any questions.



DAVID STEFFEN

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 4TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

September 26, 2023

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Shared Revenue, Elections and Consumer Protection: SB 408

Chairman Knodl and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of Senate Bill 408, a bipartisan bill relating to updates to Wisconsin's "50-piece rule."

As members of the Wisconsin State Legislature, I know you are all familiar with what is commonly referred to as the "50-piece rule." This rule rightly limits the number of identical materials that a legislator who is running for national, state or local office may distribute once they are eligible to circulate nomination papers (in most cases, this is April 15). This important rule protects taxpayers from funding what could amount to campaign efforts from a legislative office.

However, recent events, particularly the Covid-19 pandemic, brought to light instances where narrow, limited exceptions to this rule should exist in order to provide constituents with critical emergency-related information. Additionally, two specific updates to the existing rule would ensure the rule applies fairly to Assembly and Senate offices and that constituents are able to receive important end-of-session updates from their legislators.

SB 408 includes the following limited updates to Wisconsin's "50-piece rule:"

- 1) **Increases the "50-piece rule" for state senators from 50 pieces of identical materials to 150 pieces since senators represent three times the constituents that representatives do.**
- 2) **Suspends the "50-piece rule" during a formally declared state of emergency. The rule suspension is applicable only for the legislators who represent the impacted location and only for communications related to the emergency.**
- 3) **Changes the rule's starting date from the first day a candidate can circulate nomination papers, April 15th, of election year, to the last day a candidate can circulate nomination papers, June 1st, of election year. This will ensure that legislators can uphold their duty to provide transparent communication regarding end-of-session activity and votes.**

These limited updates to our state's "50-piece rule" will ensure that constituents remain properly informed during times of emergency as well as during the busy final weeks of the legislative session.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in favor of this bill. I encourage you to join me in supporting this legislation and am happy to answer any questions you have.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Steffen".

David Steffen
State Representative
4th Assembly District