

January 23, 2014

To: Members of the Senate Committee on Elections and Urban Affairs
From: Senator Glenn Grothman
Re: Senate Bill 459

Thank you for scheduling Senate Bill 459 for a public hearing. This is an important piece of legislation that will clarify the registration process for voting. Under current law, an elector is only required to show proof of residency when they register to vote after 5pm on the Friday before the election or if they register by mail and have not previously voted in Wisconsin.

This inconsistency in the requirement to show proof of residency has caused much confusion for individuals and municipal clerks throughout the state. Therefore, Representative Born and I have introduced this legislation that requires everyone that registers to vote to provide a proof of residence. Current law has an exemption for military and overseas electors and that is maintained in this legislation.

This bill also ensures the integrity of registrations. It allows municipal clerks to be sure that registrations they accept are accurate and allows clerks to verify that the registrations are coming from citizens of their municipalities.

Please join me in supporting this commonsense approach to create a uniform standard for providing proof of residence while registering to vote. This legislation will provide consistency and uniformity in the voting registration process and will allow clerks and other election officials to be confident that every registered voter resides in the residence listed on the registration form.



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF WISCONSIN

612 W. Main Street, #200
Madison, WI 53703-4714

(608) 256-0827
<http://www.lwwwi.org>

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To: Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections
Senate Committee on Elections and Urban Affairs
Re: Opposition to SB 459 and AB 603

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin opposes SB 459 and AB 603 based on our long-held position that voting is a fundamental citizen right which must be guaranteed and our belief that our state is stronger if more people are actively engaged in their government. Wisconsin election laws should provide citizens with maximum opportunity for registration, voting at the polls, and absentee voting. There is no need for this legislation, and it would make it more difficult for qualified citizens to register to vote. Moreover, it presents serious privacy issues and increases the potential for identity theft. It should be rejected.

Under current law most electors who register to vote during the open registration period do not need to provide proof of residence. To ensure that the person is a resident, the municipal clerk must mail a first-class postcard to the voting address provided. If the postcard is not returned as undeliverable, the address is valid.

Because of recent changes in election law, the list of acceptable proof-of-residence (POR) documents is shorter now than it was just three years ago, and people can no longer corroborate the residence of their family members and neighbors. Our election observers have documented instances where people have not been allowed to register at the polls because they lack proof of residence. Examples include people living with roommates, friends or family – often in temporary situations – and who do not have such documents as utility bills in their own names. There is no justification for additional restrictions that will disenfranchise more Wisconsin residents who are qualified to vote in our state but who do not possess an acceptable POR.

The current system also protects people's private information. This is an important concern for both voters and election officials, particularly Special Registration Deputies (SRDs). SRDs are private citizens deputized by municipal clerks to conduct voter registration. As it is now, they do not have to ask electors for POR. Instead they register the voter, and then the clerk checks residence by mailing a first-class postcard. SRDs do not have to decide whether a particular POR document is acceptable, and voters do not need to show a private document such as a bank statement to an SRD. This respects the elector's privacy and reduces the potential for identity theft.

We oppose SB 459/AB 603, and we urge you to protect Wisconsin voters by rejecting this unneeded and harmful legislation.

131 West Wilson Street, Suite 303
Madison, WI 53703
(608) 630-9575



**Testimony of Lisa Subeck
Executive Director, United Wisconsin
SB 459
Election and Urban Affairs Committee
January 23, 2014**

Chair Lazich and Committee Members,

My name is Lisa Subeck, and I am the Executive Director of United Wisconsin, a grassroots organization of over 200,000 Wisconsin citizens committed to supporting Wisconsin's longstanding tradition of democracy in action. On behalf of our members, I am here today to urge you to reject Senate Bill 459.

The proposed bill makes changes to the voter registration process that will make it more challenging for some individuals to register and exercise their right to vote. Under current law, those registering to vote during open registration do not need to provide documents qualifying as proof-of-residence if they are registering in person or if they are registering by mail and have previously voted in an election in Wisconsin.

For some residents, providing proof-of-residence will not pose a problem, but for a small group of eligible voters, this change could mean the difference between being able to exercise the right to vote and not voting at all. In fact, I can think of a few situations in which the changes would prove problematic.

First, I think of an elderly individual who has moved from her home to a senior living community. Often, individuals in this circumstance do not get new drivers' licenses or photo ID cards, as getting to the DMV to do so poses a barrier. No longer working, she would not have a pay check or an employer ID card with her address and likely has no official governmental ID that lists her new address. She may have a lease, but a lease is not acceptable for those registering by mail, and for someone in this situation, in-person registration may pose a significant hardship. Utilities are often included in rent, so she may have no utility bills, and her bank statements may go to a family member who handles her finances so they do not include her address. The same arrangement is likely true of checks and other documents issued by the government, if she receives any at all.

I also think of a young adult who has just moved out of his parents' home but may be living with friends or family members in a place where his name is not listed on the lease. Again, young adults often wait to get a new drivers' license or ID card, especially if they move as frequently as once each year or possibly even more often, as so many young people do. He doesn't own his home, so a property tax bill is out of the question. Like senior citizens, young people also often continue to receive mail such as bank statements and pay checks at their parents' residence so that these items do not get missed in a move. I know that as a young adult, most of my mail included my parents' rather than my own address.

Finally, I think of the homeless families with whom I worked years ago as a social service provider. These families often lacked any documentation listing a current address, as many were doubled-up with other families, spent time out on the streets, or came and went from our shelters. For these low-income individuals and families, who were predominantly people of color, obtaining the required proof-of-residence may be nearly impossible.

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Our current law ensures that the individuals I described – along with others for whom proof-of-residence may pose significant hardship – can register and exercise their right to vote. For most of us in this room, providing proof-of-residence is no big deal, but it is important we also put ourselves in the shoes of others for whom it may be a hardship. We have come a long way since the days when only landowners could vote, but I fear we are heading back in that very direction with bills such as this and others that disenfranchise a seemingly targeted set of demographics. Voting is a constitutionally protected right in our state, and we should be working to expand, not limit, access to the ballot.

This bill, which seems to be on the fast-track with hearings in both the Senate and Assembly today, is another in a long list of steps in the wrong direction for our democracy. On behalf of United Wisconsin and our members, I urge you to reject SB 459 and instead work to expand access to ballot for all Wisconsin residents.