



RICK GUNDRUM

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 58TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony on Assembly Bill 853

Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections Protection | January 30, 2024 |
Room 300 Northeast

Chair Krug, Vice-Chair Maxey, and members of the Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Election, thank you for giving Assembly Bill 853 a public hearing. I also want to thank Senator Knodl for working with me on this legislation. I've spent nearly two decades in local government as a Slinger Village Trustee, Washington County Board Supervisor, and Chairman of the Washington County Board. I've run in many local races and have submitted many local finance reports. My thoughts about doing this bill come from that local government experience.

There are a few reasons I was motivated to do this bill. Firstly, I think it would be helpful to bring everyone under one umbrella for candidates. Local government candidates will just need to submit their reports through CFIS and the Ethics Commission rather than their local clerk. Secondly, I believe this bill will take a great deal of work off of local clerks, whether they be municipal clerks, county clerks, or school board clerks. Currently local clerks are required to develop and maintain their own system for these reports. My goal is to ensure they would no longer have to with this bill. Thirdly, I believe that this bill gives the people of Wisconsin more accessibility when it comes to reviewing the campaign finance reports of local candidates. CFIS is available for just about everyone and we do know that it is getting an upgrade to make it more user-friendly in years ahead.

The first discussions and drafting about this bill began in March. There were many conversations with stakeholders, drafting attorneys, Leg Council, and Ethics Commission Administrator Dan Carlton for how we may get this bill right. Through that discussion, an amendment was introduced to address some of the concerns. Assembly Amendment 1 to Assembly Bill 853 does the following:

- A candidate for school board shall file a registration statement with the commission and a copy of that registration statement with the school district clerk. That was to address some concerns from the Wisconsin Association of School Boards.
- Language to ensure that no candidate may appear on a ballot for any elective office unless a candidate files a registration statement for each election at which they are running. This is being done to ensure that registration statements are kept up to date.
- We moved the date this bill goes into effect to July 1, 2025 from July 1, 2024. This is being done to give everyone more time to prepare for this change.

- Since we are moving the date, we have removed the fiscal elements from the bill. This will help the Ethics Commission prepare their budget proposal more effectively ahead of the next biennial budget. The fiscal changes that would apply to this bill, such as more staff and more office space, can be taken up during the budget process at that time.

I want thank all the stakeholders and co-sponsors of this bill. I am happy that it has bipartisan support and I think this will be a great change to local elections for all parties involved. I am now happy to take questions at this time.



WISCONSIN STATE SENATE

DAN KNODL

STATE SENATOR • 8TH DISTRICT

Assembly Bill 853

Public Testimony

Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections

January 30, 2024

Thank you, members of the committee for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill 853.

Unlike state candidate committees, who are required to register and file campaign finance reports to the Ethics Commission through the CFIS system, candidates for local office register and file their reports with their local clerks. This bill will shift the burden of administering campaign finance at the local level from the local clerks to the CFIS system.

The amount of time our clerks have had to devote to elections-related duties has increased significantly over the past two decades, and I believe that taking this particular time-consuming responsibility off our clerks' plates is a sensible way to help us recruit and retain good clerks.

Furthermore, having all of our state's candidates reporting through CFIS will mean that campaign finance reports for all candidates will be accessible in one place. This will facilitate greater public engagement at all levels of government, and that is something I believe we can all support.

The time to implement this change is now. The CFIS website is undergoing a significant overhaul, which makes this an opportune moment to implement this new feature. Ethics Administrator Dan Carlton is here today and will be able to speak to the Commission's plan for executing this change.

This bill is the result of many months of discussions with all affected parties, and I would like to thank Representative Gundrum for his efforts to refine this bill to everyone's satisfaction. Thank you for your consideration of this bill, and we would be happy to answer any of your questions.

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January 30, 2024

Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections:

Testimony for Public Hearing

Chair Krug and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing testimony today.

Assembly Bill 853 – relating to: local candidates filing campaign finance reports and making an appropriation.

INFORMATIONAL

This bill changes the current process of having local candidate committees file campaign finance documents with their local clerk; instead, local candidate committees will file those campaign finance documents with the Ethics Commission.

- This change will make campaign finance documents more accessible and increase transparency in the system.
- Concerns with implementation of the bill.
 - This bill has the implementation date of July 1, 2024.
 - This is during the same time period where clerks are sending absentee ballots and prepping for the August Partisan Primary with NEW maps.
 - The Ethics system currently handles filings for just under 500 candidate contests. This bill will add over 15,000+ candidate contests to their workload.
 - The bill adds three new Ethics employees. This does not seem like enough resources to handle the work originally being done by over 2,000 clerks.

RECOMMENDATION – APPROVAL of Assembly Amendment 1

The amendment helps with the implementation by delaying the change to July 1, 2025.

- Implementation after the only two scheduled elections in an odd year will make the transition easier on clerks.
- Shifting the budgeting to the next budget cycle will give the Ethics Commission time to anticipate needs after the new reporting system is developed and implemented.
- School district candidates will file both in the Ethics system and with their local clerk.
- Allows for time to develop training for clerks. Clerks will ultimately be the ones training their candidates to complete the online filing.
- The delay also allows for more time for broadband infrastructure to be put in place. As we are still dealing with broadband issues throughout the state, this will allow for easier access for rural areas to be compliant.

Thank you for your consideration,

Lisa Tollefson



Statement of Daniel G. Guerra Jr. on Assembly Bill 853
January 30, 2024

Below is a statement by Daniel G. Guerra Jr., CEO of Altus and a leader of the Wisconsin Business for Democracy collaborative. Business for Democracy is raising the voice of small business for the need to give voters more choice in selecting the majority consensus winners of elections by using Ranked Choice Voting.

“The sponsors of Assembly Bill 853 would ban an election method called ranked choice voting which is used nationwide in over 50 cities, counties, and states. It is not currently allowed by Wisconsin law, which raises the question about the real purpose of the bill.

Supporters of the bill attempt to cite problems that other jurisdictions have had using ranked choice voting saying that it is confusing to voters, too complicated to calculate, causes extended delays in getting election results, and doesn't deliver promised results such as increasing voter turnout, focusing candidates' attention on issues instead of mudslinging and reduces political polarization.

These manufactured criticisms can be easily refuted by allowing experts to testify from states where ranked choice voting is already used such as Utah and Alaska, two heavily Republican states.

But suffice it to say that ranked choice voting is not found to confuse voters in other states (and surely supporters are not saying that Wisconsin voters are not as smart as these other voters), computers can process ballots quickly thus not postponing results, and voter turnout is at least as good as traditional voting methods. Ranked choice voting does result in more civil campaigning from which a reduction in polarization is achieved. And as a benefit, candidates would need to win with a majority of the vote giving them a real mandate to govern.

We suspect that the real reason for AB 853 is to protect political parties and the ability of their powerful elite to dictate which candidates the voters will have to choose from. Real candidate choice is something political parties fear and that is why they want to ban what is already illegal.”

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