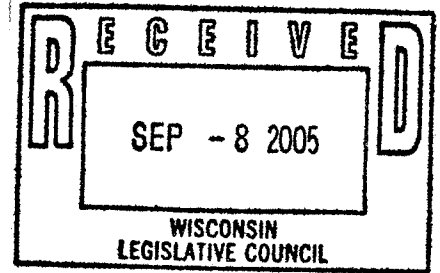


September 7, 2005



Wisconsin Legislative Council
One East Main Street
Suite 401
P.O. Box 2536
Madison, WI 53701-2536

To the Members of the Special Committee on Election Law Reform:

I write as legal coordinator of the 2004 Milwaukee Election Protection Coalition to support your efforts on election reform. Earlier this year we sent the Council our Legal Committee's Report containing observations and recommendations following the primary and general elections in the fall of 2004. The Report summarized observations drawn from the more than 200 legal observers who participated in poll watching during these elections. Our Report highlighted a number of significant administrative problems with the November 2d election in Milwaukee.

Many of the proposals currently under consideration by the Council would improve election administration. We would like to urge inclusion of certain additional proposals in the package the Council sends to the legislature.

Staffing, Training and Planning

Adequately staffed polling places is a paramount concern. This means not only increasing the number of poll workers, but also ensuring better training and operational planning that allows all of the crucial tasks, including recordkeeping, are properly performed while reducing the waiting time for voters. To ensure that communities provide adequate staffing, we strongly support requiring a planning process, tailored to the anticipated needs of particular communities. Assembly Bill 542 and Senate Bill 249 contain provisions for mandatory training, additional poll workers, and election day plans that specifically address these needs. We urge you to incorporate these measures into the Council's proposals.

Safeguards to Prevent Ineligible Felons from Voting

These bills also contain other provisions that correspond to recommendations in our Report, including measures that would prevent ineligible felons from voting. We did not observe fraud in the November, 2004, election but did recommend strengthening and improving existing procedures that would deter individuals from committing election law violations. Including an affirmation on the registration form that an individual registering has not been convicted or is not currently on probation, parole, or extended supervision spells out the terms of the law in a manner far superior to the current form that simply affirms one's eligibility to vote. Poll list notations will also enable poll workers to determine on the spot whether a voter is ineligible due to a felony-related exclusion.

Absentee Balloting

There are a few proposals currently under consideration by the Council that concern us as they would likely restrict the voter participation. In particular, restricting the use of absentee ballots to a set of exclusive reasons would be regressing from the improved access granted by "no-excuse" absentee voting and would result in fewer votes cast. We view the large number of voters who sought to vote absentee in 2004 as a sign of success at expanding voter turnout, a goal we all share. The fact that it also highlighted weaknesses in the administration of absentee balloting should not lead us to retreat from the goal. Alternative reforms can correct administrative problems without losing the broader access provided under the current law.

AB 542 and SB 249 contain proposals that would improve the casting and counting of absentee ballots. We support provisions that would allow for satellite locations to accommodate additional voters who wish to vote by absentee ballot. In addition, these bills provide for centralized absentee ballot counting. This is an extremely important reform that would allow absentee ballots to be handled by a separate group of election workers who could be specially trained in the laws governing absentee balloting. Our observers noted that poll workers were frequently overwhelmed by the task of processing absentee ballots during the course of their other duties on election day and were not fully trained in many of the details associated with the handling absentee ballots. Separate handling of these ballots will improve the process and provide greater assurance that all eligible voters casting absentee ballots have their ballots counted and that there is an accurate record of these votes.

Restrictive Proposals Unnecessary

There are two other proposals currently before the Council that concern us. One involves eliminating corroboration by another voter as a means of verifying a voters' address. The provision allowing for address corroboration, often by a family member, broadens access to the polls by potential voters who are otherwise unable to provide documentary support. Additionally, the proposal to mark voters with indelible ink imposes yet another requirement on poll workers, both in marking the voter and then checking voters for a mark, and would add to the delays in voting. It is not warranted by any evidence showing double voting to be a significant issue. We urge that the Council not forward these recommendations for legislative action.

We appreciate the efforts of the Committee and are hopeful that a comprehensive election reform package can be presented to the Legislature that reflects the collective experience of those who have been work and observe the election process. Improving election administration while maintaining Wisconsin's fair and open election procedures ensures that we continue to maximize electoral participation and protect every citizen's right to vote.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Barbara Zack Quindel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Barbara" being the most prominent.

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