



Secure Democracy USA

Submitted to the Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections
November 6, 2025

Testimony RE: Assembly Bill 617

Chair Maxey, Vice-Chair Krug, and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide informational testimony on Assembly Bill 617, which relates to applying for and returning absentee ballots, central counting locations, and other aspects of voting and election administration.

We also wish to thank Representative Krug and Senator Cabral-Guevara for authoring this legislation, and all members of the committee for your commitment to the integrity of Wisconsin elections.

A.B. 617 would make several important changes to strengthen election transparency and voter confidence. In other areas, this proposal could be improved to better serve voters and support election officials in their diligent administration of Wisconsin elections.

The following provisions would strengthen transparency and voter confidence:

- First, A.B. 617 **would allow absentee voters to receive automatic text message notifications** about the status of their absentee ballot, if they so choose. This change is an important transparency and security measure that would give greater peace of mind to the many Wisconsinites who choose to vote absentee.
- Furthermore, A.B. 617 **would require local election officials to return an absentee ballot with an improper or incomplete certificate** to the voter whenever time permits. This welcome change would provide greater clarity and promote uniformity in how clerks treat absentee ballot envelope certificates with minor mistakes, thereby reducing the potential for confusion and litigation.
- Finally, A.B. 617 **would standardize timelines, notification requirements, and other processes** for electors determined by a court to be incompetent and ineligible to vote. These changes will enhance the accuracy of Wisconsin's voter list, improve communication between election officials and affected voters, and facilitate the exchange of information between courts, the Wisconsin Election Commission, and local election officials.

The following provisions could be improved to better serve Wisconsin voters and election integrity:

- A.B. 617 creates **new election-night reporting requirements that may place significant administrative strain on** municipal and county clerks. Under the bill, at 10 p.m. on Election Night and every hour thereafter, municipal and county clerks would have to report and publish the total number of ballots cast, ballots canvassed, and ballots that remain to be canvassed. These requirements may unintentionally work against the goal of timely, accurate results reporting – particularly as local election officials are currently not allowed to begin canvassing absentee ballots until 7 a.m. on Election Day.
- Finally, A.B. 617 **could provide more specific, explicit instructions and timelines for when and how clerks must return absentee ballots** with a missing or improperly completed certificate to the voter. As written, A.B. 617 would require election officials to return such absentee ballots to the voter “whenever time permits.” To avoid confusion, we recommend describing specifically what clerks may and may not do with respect to notifying voters with defective certificates, as well as how – and when – they can return the sealed envelopes and/or new envelopes to facilitate correction.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit informational testimony today. We would be happy to provide the committee with any additional information.

Sincerely,

Peter Skopec

Director of Advocacy

Secure Democracy USA

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