



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF WISCONSIN EDUCATION NETWORK

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

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

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To: Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections

Re: Opposition to AB 225

Founded in 1920 by suffragists who had worked for decades to win the right to vote for women, the League of Women Voters believes that voting is a fundamental right which must be guaranteed. The legislation you are considering is a huge overhaul of our Wisconsin election system, and it deserves more time for thoughtful consideration of public input.

We are concerned about the many provisions in this bill that restrict citizens' ability to vote, while others make it easier for moneyed interests to influence our elections. We urge you to take the time to carefully consider input from multiple perspectives in order to understand fully the wide-reaching implications – as well as the devil in the details of implementation – for both voters and local officials if this bill should pass.

Photo ID

If we must have a photo ID law, it is a step in the right direction to allow an exemption for people who are indigent, who have a religious objection, or who do not possess the underlying documentation needed to obtain an acceptable ID. However, the exemption in this bill is problematic, for several reasons:

1. There are many reasons why a person might not have an ID. They might not be able to get to the DMV to obtain one. Their ID might have been stolen or lost shortly before the election.
2. The bill requires people to not only sign an affirmation but also swear or affirm before the chief inspector at the polling place. The affirmation may be humiliating, and many people do not want to take an oath orally in front of their neighbors about their financial status or religious beliefs.
3. The bill specifies that ballots of people who make the affirmation will be marked in the same manner as a challenged ballot, compromising the privacy of the ballot.
4. The bill creates more work for local election officials, who are charged with investigating and standing in judgment of their neighbors' affirmations in the case of a recount. What will be their criteria? How poor is too poor? Will they question their neighbors' religious convictions?

In the absence of evidence that voter impersonation exists, we still do not believe a voter photo ID law is justified. It costs millions of taxpayer dollars to implement, it prevents people from voting, and it does not solve a problem. That is a net loss for democracy.

If we must have this law, we recommend that you allow a broader array of acceptable IDs, as do other states. That will save money and not exclude as many voters.

Proof of Residence for Election Day Registration

The trend is clear that more and more secure financial and personal business transactions take place online. We support adding cell phone and credit card statements to the list of acceptable proof-of-residence documents, as a matter of keeping up with the times. However, we oppose the measure that prohibits an elector from providing an electronically displayed proof of residence document. After all, printing a document from a website does not add security. It only makes a printed copy of what is online.

The League had election observers in 440 polling places in November, and there were no reports of election officials not being able to read the electronic documents. There were complaints about this from other election observers who thought they should be able to see the proof-of-residence. But it is the job of the election officials, not the observers, to view documents that include people's private information. In fact, we did hear concerns from voters who were worried about the privacy of such things as their account numbers on their bank statements.

Poll book signature requirement

It is the responsibility of the poll worker to ensure that the poll book is signed. The voter should not be penalized if the poll worker has made a mistake.

The worst of this provision is that there is no way to know which ballots were cast by the people who did not sign the poll book. Therefore, ballots would have to be pulled at random during a recount, which could well affect the outcome.

The public should know about how this will take place, and we will do what we can to make that happen. Most people would balk at the idea that, even if they sign the poll book, their own ballot may be tossed because a poll worker forgot to ask another voter to sign.

Nominees to the Government Accountability Board

When the GAB was created through bipartisan legislation in 2007, a system for selecting board members was debated and adopted to ensure that the board would be independent of partisan influence. By doubling the number of nominations made by the candidate nomination committee, this bill transfers more of the vetting and selection authority to the Governor's office. Thus it disrupts the checks and balances intended to maintain a nonpartisan board.

Voting by Absentee Ballot in Person

Currently municipalities are not required to offer evening or weekend hours for early voting, but many do. People who work long hours, need to deal with child or elder care, or travel often find evenings and weekends much more convenient for voting. This bill limits the ability of local clerks to provide services to their constituents.

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By treating all municipalities equally, this bill treats voters unequally. The legislation requires that only the clerk – not a clerk’s staff member or designated agent – may work with citizens in evening or weekend hours for in-person absentee voting. This gives an unfair advantage to voters in small municipalities, where one clerk serves a smaller number of voters.

Campaign Finance Provisions

While AB 225 would make it more difficult for individual citizens to vote, it eases restrictions on moneyed interests that seek to influence our elections. It removes the disclosure requirements for most so-called “issue ads” which purport to be about issues but for some reason fill the airwaves with mention of specific candidates before an election. Voters deserve to know what groups are funding these ads.

The bill deletes a century-old prohibition on campaign contributions by corporations and cooperatives. This ban, which was enacted to protect Wisconsin elections from undue influence by moneyed interests, is currently blocked by the Citizens United ruling. However, the League still heartily supports it, and we believe it should remain on the books in the hope it can be enforced in the future.

Finally, the bill extends the period in which lobbyists may make campaign contributions, increasing the perception of and the potential for conflict of interest for elected officials who are running for re-election.

Conclusion

While there is not time to analyze and address all of the anti-voter aspects of AB 225, we wonder what Wisconsin voters could possibly have done to deserve such restrictive legislation. Wisconsin consistently ranks near the top nationally for clean, efficiently administered elections with high voter participation. The problems we have seen have largely been a matter of poll worker error or, more rarely, mismanagement.

The best way to improve our elections, therefore, is to provide for more and better training of local election officials in order to reduce errors.

This bill would make voting more difficult and elections more expensive. We oppose AB 225 and urge you to do the same.