

Dept. of Military Affairs: Wisconsin National Guard to assist with polling station staffing, other missions

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The Wisconsin National Guard assumed two new missions this week as part of the state's ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A still to-be-determined number of Citizen Soldiers and Airmen from the Wisconsin National Guard will serve as polling site workers at polling locations across Wisconsin. Meanwhile, administrative and medic personnel are helping to staff three separate voluntary self-isolation facilities in Milwaukee and Madison.

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services is managing two of the self-isolation facilities, while a third is being run by the City of Milwaukee and Milwaukee County. There are 12 troops assigned at each of the two state-run self-isolation facilities working in shifts to augment staff there, while nearly 30 Wisconsin National Guard personnel are helping staff a Milwaukee-run facility. Those teams are providing administrative support and medical monitoring at each site for individuals who would otherwise be unable to effectively self-isolate.

The Wisconsin National Guard also received a request for assistance from the Wisconsin Elections Commission to provide personnel to staff polling sites at locations around the state for the upcoming April 7 election.

The Wisconsin National Guard continues to work with state elections officials to determine how many Citizen Soldiers and Airmen will be needed to staff the polls and where they will be needed. The Guard members will serve in civilian clothes and not be in uniform at the polls, and they will be there to augment existing volunteers, poll workers and local elections officials, who will continue administering

their own polling locations. They will fulfill the same duties as traditional poll workers.

Guard members called to state active duty to staff polling places will receive the same training and have the same expectations as other poll workers, officials said. In accordance with state law, all Guard members serving at a polling station will be residents of that county.

“We are Citizen Soldiers and Airmen who live and work in these same communities,” Maj. Gen. Paul Knapp, Wisconsin’s adjutant general said. “We are neighbors helping neighbors, and our Soldiers and Airmen span every community in Wisconsin. Clerks and elections officials are having a hard time finding volunteers to work at the polls so our democratic process can play out, and we’re honored to assist and help ease some of the staffing needs.”

Knapp also urged Wisconsin residents to vote absentee in the April 7 election. Absentee ballots can be requested until 5 p.m. Thursday, April 2 at [MyVote.wi.gov](https://www.myvote.wi.gov) or in writing, e-mail, or fax through a voter’s municipal clerk’s office. He also urged other able members of the community to volunteer to staff polling sites.

The Wisconsin National Guard is simultaneously working closely with the Wisconsin Elections Commission to assist with logistics considerations to ensure the election can be held in a safe and sanitary manner by procuring and distributing hand sanitizer, wipes, spray bottles, and other necessary supplies to polling sites.

The Guard continues to support other missions around Wisconsin as well, including an ongoing mission supporting DHS and conducting warehouse operations, where they’ve helped move critical personal protective equipment (PPE) as well as receive and repackage PPE for distribution to sites around the state.

Approximately 350 Soldiers and Airmen are serving on state active duty in response to a public health emergency declaration from Gov. Tony Evers March 12.

A team of six Wisconsin National Guard medics also augmented the staff at a senior living facility in Grafton, Wisconsin, for three days in March while the facility dealt with a staffing shortfall after a COVID-19 outbreak there.

Also last month, a team of 30 Wisconsin National Guard personnel assisted the

Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) transport a group of Wisconsin citizens back to their homes after they returned to our state from a cruise ship that had confirmed cases of COVID-19 onboard.

The Wisconsin National Guard continues to work closely with partners across state government to anticipate needs and potential resource requests. Troops are prepared, if needed, to assist the Wisconsin DHS with specimen collection for COVID-19 testing, logistics support such as moving critical supplies or tests around the state, transportation missions, and augmenting health care facilities with some of our medical personnel, if needed.