

District attorneys seek alternatives for circulating nomination papers amid COVID-19 pandemic

Posted on Friday, Apr 10, 2020

The state's district attorneys are asking the state Elections Commission to consider possible alternatives to requiring candidates to circulate nomination papers.

In a letter to the commission this week, the Wisconsin District Attorneys Association noted the process of circulating nomination papers, which begins Wednesday, "is contrary to the health emergency orders and science of how the virus spreads." The letter notes there are no options to circulate and certify the papers electronically and circulators currently are required to witness each signature in person.

WDAA President Louis Molepske, the Portage County DA and a former Dem lawmaker, told WisPolitics.com there are also questions for prosecutors on whether circulating papers are considered an essential function under the gov's stay-at-home order, not to mention the health risks to circulators and signers of being in close proximity during the process.

"It's basically a process that is a petri dish of problems," Molepske said.

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Dean Knudson, Elections Commission chair and a former GOP lawmaker, said the agency plans to discuss the issue at today's meeting. Still, he said the commission lacks the power to issue emergency rules to make accommodations for candidates faced with circulating nomination papers amid the pandemic. He noted candidates still have the option to mail nomination papers to supporters, who could fill them out at home and mail them back.

Knudson said he wondered if lawmakers, who also must collect signatures, will be

“highly motivated” to address the requirement in an upcoming legislative package to deal with the virus.

Still, Knudson also said he believes circulating nomination papers can’t be hindered by the gov’s order.

“That’s a very different question than whether it’s a smart thing to do right now. I’m not sure too many people want to do business as usual,” Knudson said.

Current law requires signatures to be turned into the Elections Commission by June 1. Assembly candidates need a minimum of 200 valid signatures to qualify for the ballot, while those seeking a seat in the Senate need at least 400.

The WDAA request comes as lawmakers elsewhere are also grappling with the issue. A bipartisan group of candidates in Massachusetts asked the state’s highest court to grant them relief from requirements they gather signatures during the pandemic to get on the fall ballot.

Read the WDAA letter [here](#).