

Our Revolution: Online tool engages public in qualifying candidates for the ballot

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With social distancing practices and stay-at-home orders preventing candidates from approaching voters in person and a June 1 deadline looming for candidates to submit signatures on nomination papers to gain a place on the ballot for this fall's elections, the grassroots social action group Our Wisconsin Revolution is launching a website allowing the public to easily find candidates' nomination forms and sign for them without leaving home.

The online system, developed in conjunction with the AI-driven political consulting firm AlephAPI, responds to the dilemma posed by the Wisconsin Elections Commission's decision to require candidates to comply with traditional nomination requirements despite COVID-19 restrictions. The number of signatures by eligible voters on nomination forms needed to qualify for the ballot is unchanged and the commission is not allowing digital forms or electronic signatures.

"If the task of gathering nomination signatures is left entirely to those seeking to run, and they have to gather those signatures without approaching voters, there will inevitably be a significant number of candidates who fall short of the number of signatures required to be included on the ballot and voters will have fewer choices in key elections," Our Wisconsin Revolution executive director Mike McCabe said. "That's why we're providing this way for the public to get involved as never before in helping candidates get on the ballot. We all need to pitch in to make sure democracy survives COVID-19."

Voters can go to the website nominationpapers.ourwisconsinrev.com, enter their street address and zip code, and the system automatically generates pre-filled

nomination papers for candidates in their area. The papers can then be printed, signed and mailed to the address on each candidate's nomination form. Visitors to the site can download the nomination papers for candidates they support directly from the site, or they can choose to have the forms emailed to them.

"The aim here is to make it easy for eligible voters in a household to follow the state's inflexible rules and sign nomination forms for candidates in their area while still practicing social distancing and honoring Wisconsin's Safer at Home order," McCabe said, adding that each eligible voter in a household can sign for only one candidate for each office. For the nominations to be valid, each nomination petition also needs to be signed by a circulator certifying it. The person signing as the circulator also can be one of the signers of the petition. The forms generated by the online system are in a format approved by the Wisconsin Elections Commission.

Our Wisconsin Revolution will be encouraging voters throughout the state to print, sign and mail back nomination papers for candidates they support and also share the link to the website nominationpapers.ourwisconsinrev.com with neighbors, friends and contacts in their communities and throughout the state to maximize public participation in the nomination process.

"AlephAPI is excited to partner with Our Wisconsin Revolution to offer Wisconsinites a one-stop solution for signing nomination papers safely at home. Founded in 2018, AlephAPI's mission is to strengthen our democracy by empowering people in our political process and increasing electoral participation," AlephAPI's Bob Harlow and Terrance Warthen said.

The deadline for candidates to submit nomination signatures to the Wisconsin Elections Commission is June 1, making it important for voters to get their signed and certified forms mailed back to the candidates as far in advance of that date as possible. Wisconsin's fall general election is November 3. The primary election is August 11.