

Common Cause Wisconsin: Statement for the public hearing on the Audit Report 21-19

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Dear Members of the Wisconsin Joint Legislative Audit Committee,
First and foremost, we must not overlook and diminish the very significant fact that, according to experts in Wisconsin and across the nation, the 2020 election here is considered to be among the most securely run and administered in recent state history. It would benefit this committee in proceeding with the handling of the Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB) report to agree on this indisputable point. It is one thing to carefully examine the election procedures that were in place in Wisconsin during a unique and unprecedented public health crisis and that led to several actions that were out of the ordinary when compared to a “normal” election year, pre-COVID. It is another thing altogether, and not at all legitimate or acceptable, to make false allegations and claims about malfeasance and fraud when there is no evidence to back up such reckless charges.

There is always room for improvement and adjustments that can be made to improve election administration and security. These are evolving matters from one election to another and always deserve to be reviewed and updated. Such reviews occur after every election. Election officials, clerks, and poll workers performed extraordinarily well under the unique and extenuating circumstances of the 2020 elections, again, which are considered to be among the most secure and successfully administered elections in recent history. Unfortunately, the rhetoric and irresponsible actions of some partisans have attempted to undermine public confidence in the conduct of the 2020 elections in Wisconsin. It is critical that a review of 2020 be based on truth in order to be able to factually assess the value of the LAB report and the recommendations that have been put forward for public inspection and consideration.

An additional and critical consideration is the process utilized by the LAB in the

conduct of the review and release of the report. The process of releasing this report was inconsistent with past LAB procedure with regard to confirmation of the accuracy of the report. The Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC) should have been able to review, address and discuss the LAB's findings directly with the LAB, prior to the public release of the report. If there were discrepancies between the LAB's findings and WEC response, those differences and corrections should have been noted in the report before the report was publicly released. Until the WEC has had an opportunity to address these discrepancies, the Legislative Audit Bureau Committee must be patient and reserve making any final determination about what changes, if any, should be made to election administration and security in Wisconsin.

Elections in Wisconsin, and elsewhere can always be improved. And there is opportunity to accomplish this constructively and responsibly. But it ought to start from the premise that the 2020 elections in Wisconsin were successful and remarkably well conducted. Not, that they were suspect and fraudulent as some partisans have wrongly and recklessly charged.

Stop looking and portraying the 2020 election as if it failed. It did not. Stop lying about how the election was administered. Stop proposing legislation that doesn't seek to improve election administration but rather, simply makes it more difficult for many Wisconsinites to participate in our elections. Instead, start from a place that is grounded in truth that the 2020 election was in fact secure and run well. And from that basis in truth, we can seek to improve our election administration and our election clerk performance.

The most important question you should be asking is how can we improve the voting experiences for Wisconsinites? How do we improve voter accessibility? But also, how do we improve poll worker and election clerk trainings? How do we ensure that there is sufficient and accurate voter information and data? How do we protect voter drop box access? How do we make sure elections are adequately funded throughout Wisconsin through the state budget process?

There are a number of elements of the LAB report that need greater follow up and follow through. Common Cause in Wisconsin will comment on these recommendations after WEC's staff and commissioners are given the opportunity to respond and correct this report. And we respectfully request that this committee also do their due diligence to improve elections by beginning and basing this entire process in truth, rather than in false allegations and unfounded conspiracy theories. Thank you.

Jay Heck

CC/WI Executive Director

Common Cause Wisconsin