

Sen. Cowles, Rep. Kerkman: Elections Administration audit released

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MADISON - Today, the nonpartisan Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB) released its audit of elections administration (report 21-19). In February 2021, the Joint Legislative Audit Committee, which is co-chaired by Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) and Representative Samantha Kerkman (R-Salem Lakes), directed LAB to undertake this audit effort.

As directed by the Joint Legislative Audit Committee, LAB evaluated elections administration issues, including:

- efforts by the Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC) to comply with election laws, including by working with clerks to ensure voter registration records include only eligible voters, and by providing training and guidance to clerks;
- efforts by clerks to comply with election laws, including by administering elections, processing absentee ballots, and performing recount responsibilities, as well as the observations and concerns of clerks regarding elections administration;
- the use of electronic voting equipment, including the methodology and results of WEC's most-recent statutorily required post-election audit and the actions taken as a result of this audit; and
- General Election-related complaints filed with WEC and clerks, as well as how these complaints were addressed.

LAB indicated that it contacted WEC's staff, surveyed all 1,835 municipal clerks and

72 county clerks in April 2021, contacted 179 clerks to obtain additional information about elections administration issues, analyzed voter registration data, physically review 14,710 certificates that accompanied absentee ballots returned to clerks in 29 municipalities throughout the state, reviewed the results of 175 statutorily required tests of electronic voting equipment that clerks in 25 municipalities completed before the November 2020 General Election, and reviewed all 45 sworn, written complaints pertaining to the General Election that were filed with WEC as of late-May 2021.

In its report, LAB makes 30 recommendations to WEC's staff for various improvements and includes 18 issues for legislative consideration.

"Given the importance of this audit and the length of this report, I intend to thoroughly review its findings and recommendations over the following days, but generally speaking, this audit affirms much of what we expected. Many of the findings show that WEC and its staff are not complying with state statute on several fronts, from clerk training to verification of voters and voter registration. I plan to work closely with my legislative colleagues to address the recommendations in this audit, and I expect to have a hearing on this audit soon," said Senator Cowles.

"Elections are the foundation upon which our government is built," said Rep. Kerkman. "Unfortunately, this non-partisan report uncovered a number of instances in which existing laws were ignored by the very agency entrusted with overseeing our state's elections. It is critically important that we restore trust in our elections process. My Republican legislative colleagues and I remain committed to using the audit's findings as a blueprint to bring necessary reforms where needed."

Copies of LAB's report may be obtained from its website at www.legis.wisconsin.gov/lab or by calling (608) 266-2818. Report concerns related to state government activities to LAB by calling the toll-free hotline at 1-877-FRAUD-17.