

Sen. Marklein: Election audit results delivered, mostly

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The non-partisan Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB) delivered the results of an audit of the November 2020 Election to the Joint Legislative Audit Committee on October 22, 2021. As a member of this committee, I initiated and helped to craft the scope of this audit. The full report from the LAB is available for your review: <https://legis.wisconsin.gov/lab>

The LAB provided an overview at a public hearing on Wednesday, November 9, 2021 and you can view this hearing on WisconsinEye: <https://wiseye.org/2021/11/09/joint-legislative-audit-committee-41/>

According to the LAB, they contacted the Wisconsin Election Commission (WEC) and surveyed all 1,835 municipal clerks and 72 county clerks. They contacted 179 clerks for more information and physically reviewed 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 45 sworn, written complaints related to the election that were filed by May 2021.

Unfortunately, the City of Madison did not provide an opportunity to physically handle their ballots. As a result, the Senate Committee on Elections, Election Process Reform and Ethics has issued subpoenas to gather this important evidence which will be turned over to the LAB to complete the audit.

Despite the incomplete data, the LAB recommended 30 actions that should be taken by WEC to reform and improve the way election laws are executed in Wisconsin. You will find these recommendations in Appendix 7 of the report.

Several of these recommendations tell WEC to take action to follow existing state laws. There were several issues, identified by the audit, in which WEC is not following state laws related to providing training, maintaining voter records, counting ballots, collecting ballots and more.

I am concerned that WEC is not following state laws. Our hard-working, local municipal clerks rely on WEC to provide guidance, training and support so that they may do the very important, difficult and time-consuming job of executing elections in Wisconsin. If WEC is not following state laws, they are not fulfilling their essential duty to our local clerks.

The LAB also provided 18 items for Legislative consideration. You will find these recommendations in Appendix 8 of the report. These are 18 ideas that the legislature could write bills to address. Five of these recommendations have already been addressed with legislation that was vetoed by Governor Tony Evers.

The legislature has passed nine of 10 bills related to election reform. The Governor has vetoed eight of these bills, including legislation that would stop private money from influencing elections, outlaw ballot harvesting, enforce Voter ID for indefinitely confined claims, prevent illegal “curing” of ballots by municipal clerks and more. This is the Senate’s Dashboard of these bills: <https://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/republicans/election-bills>

Bottom-line, the results of this audit tell us that there are issues we must address at the state level to make sure that our local elections officials have the support and tools they need to execute elections efficiently and legally. We have more work to do and the legislature will continue to strive for positive reforms.

As an individual, you can play a role in efficient, legal elections too! Please consider volunteering to work at a polling place in your community for future elections. This will give you the unique opportunity to participate in the electoral process and ensure election integrity. According to WEC, there are two ways to be nominated: either through a nomination from the Democratic or Republican Party or by applying directly to your town, village or city clerk. Our hard-working municipal clerks are always looking for help. Please consider volunteering for these important jobs.

Nominations by political parties are due by November 30, 2021 for the 2022 election cycle. Please visit www.wisdems.org/county-parties or www.wisgop.org/county-parties to

volunteer for this important nomination right away.

Again, we have the results of the LAB Election Audit, mostly. I look forward to reviewing amended findings once the LAB receives all of the data they need from the City of Madison to complete their audit. I also will continue our work to reform and modernize election laws.