

# Senate approves banning ballot harvesting, barring clerks from adding missing info to absentee ballot envelopes

Posted on Tuesday, May 11, 2021

The Senate signed off on barring local clerks from filling in missing information absentee ballot envelopes and explicitly banning ballot harvesting as part of an ongoing effort by Republicans to overhaul state election laws.

Republicans hailed the bills as needed steps to ensure confidence in the state's election procedures, while Dems decided the bills as an effort to perpetuate the "Big Lie" from former President Trump that the 2020 election was stolen.

SB 203 cleared 21-12 along party lines, while SB 212 to ban clerks adding missing information was approved 20-13 with Sen. Roger Roth, R-Appleton, joining Dems in voting no. Evers is expected to veto both if they reach his desk.

Roth didn't speak during debate on SB 212, but he wrote a column last month calling for a statewide standard for curing ballots that contain errors "so that voters have confidence that their constitutional right to vote is not negated by what amounts to a clerical error."

**>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

The Elections Commission has said there is no explicit ban on ballot harvesting in Wisconsin, though it's also not allowed in state statute. SB 203 would set new standards for returning absentee ballots beyond voters sending them back themselves or taking them to the clerk's office. That includes only allowing immediate family — such as parents, siblings, grandparents or grandchildren — to

return a completed absentee ballot on behalf of another voter. For those without an immediate family member who could return a ballot, they would be able to designate a registered voter in writing to fill that role.

The bill also would ban events like Madison's "Democracy in the Park" unless they met a series of standards. Last fall, Madison sent poll workers to more than 200 city parks to collect completed absentee ballots amid concerns over delays in U.S. Postal Service delivery. The city ran the events Sept. 26 and Oct. 3.

Under the bill, such events would only be allowed within the normal early voting period of two weeks before an election. The alternative sites would also have to be run by election inspectors or municipal clerk staff.

SB 212 would require clerks to send back to voters absentee ballot envelopes that are missing information such as a street name or municipality so it can be added in. Clerks would also have to post notification of the defect on the voter's MyVote Wisconsin page.

Trump unsuccessfully challenged 5,500 votes in liberal Dane and Milwaukee counties because clerks filled in missing information on the absentee ballot envelopes and another 17,270 that were collected at "Democracy in the Park" as part of his failed lawsuits seeking to overturn the results.