

Gov. Evers: Announces plan to protect voting rights, democracy in Wisconsin

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Governor's proposal makes voting easier and more accessible for eligible voters, supports local election administration, ensures elections remain free and secure

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers today announced several initiatives that will be included in his 2023-25 biennial budget proposal to defend voting rights and democracy in Wisconsin. The governor's plan includes streamlining processes to make it easier for eligible Wisconsinites to register to vote and cast their ballot, ensuring voting equipment and databases are secure and well-maintained, and supporting local elections officials who work tirelessly to administer elections.

"The right to vote is fundamental to our democracy, and we should be making it easier—not harder—for every eligible voter to cast their ballot without interference from politicians," said Gov. Evers. "Even as some politicians continue their efforts to undermine our safe, secure elections, restrict access to the ballot box, and control the outcomes of our elections, I have and will continue to defend and support the right to vote, our clerks, poll workers, and election administrators, and the opportunity to participate in our democracy.

"These investments will help ensure eligible Wisconsinites can exercise their fundamental right to vote and that our local partners have the resources they need to continue administering elections safely, efficiently, and securely."

A list of the governor's proposals to make voting easy and accessible to all eligible

voters, support local partners and elections officials in administering elections, and ensure Wisconsin's elections remain safe, fair, and secure is available below.

Making Voting Easy and Accessible

Gov. Evers' budget proposes several critical changes that make it easier for eligible Wisconsinites to cast a ballot, including:

- Providing \$172,700 for the Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC) to work with the Department of Transportation (WisDOT) to implement automatic voter registration. WEC will facilitate the initial registration of all eligible electors as soon as practicable, and WisDOT will be appropriated \$349,000 in fiscal year 2023-24 to address one-time costs. More than 20 states, including Michigan and Illinois, as well as Washington, D.C., have implemented automatic voter registration;
- Restoring state law requiring all public high schools to offer voter registration for enrolled students and staff and allowing private and Tribal high schools to do the same, expanding access for newly eligible voters to register to vote;
- Restoring previous residency requirements so that a resident of Wisconsin is eligible to vote in an election in a municipality or ward if the voter has been a resident of that location for at least ten consecutive days before an election;
- Eliminating the restriction on how soon a person may complete an absentee ballot in-person, making in person absentee voting more accessible; and
- Modifying certain voter identification requirements to comply with current court rulings and requiring the University of Wisconsin System and the Wisconsin Technical College System to issue identification cards that meet the revised requirement.

Additionally, Gov. Evers proposes ensuring all eligible voters are aware and informed of their rights at the polls by requiring polling places to post a voter bill of rights that informs voters of voting rights guaranteed under current law.

Supporting Local Election Administration

Gov. Evers' budget supports local governments and elections officials in administering elections by:

- Allowing a county or municipal clerk to canvass absentee ballots on the day before an election after working with WEC to ensure it will be conducted securely and effectively. This will allow clerks to better manage the workload of administering elections and may result in faster vote tabulation and reporting;

- Modifying the scheduling of special elections to ensure they are scheduled with sufficient time to comply with federal requirements for sending ballots to military and overseas voters, protecting these voters from disenfranchisement;
- Enabling WEC to reimburse counties and municipalities for certain costs incurred in the administration of special primaries and special elections through a GPR sum sufficient appropriation, further ensuring these local governments have the resources they need to safely and efficiently administer elections;
- Modifying WEC's recount appropriation to allow local units of government and petitioners to be reimbursed in a timely manner;
- Explicitly allowing WEC training funds to be used to train municipal and county clerks on all aspects of election administration, in addition to voter ID requirements; and
- Providing \$400,000 to create a grant program for municipalities to purchase Badger Books. Badger Books are an electronic version of the voter list and are used to check in voters, process election day registrations, and record absentee participation. The use of Badger Books can help clerks manage Election Day tasks more efficiently and speed up the registration and voting process for in-person voters.

Creating the Office of Election Transparency and Compliance

To better and more quickly respond to inquiries and complaints regarding potential election law violations, Gov. Evers' budget invests nearly \$2 million over the biennium and creates 10 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions to create an Office of Election Transparency and Compliance. The office will be provided resources to improve audits on voting equipment, databases, and potentially hire an outside contractor to review certain information, such as voter lists, to ensure continued confidence in Wisconsin elections.