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February 11, 2021

To: Joint Legislative Audit Committee

Re: Testimony for hearing on proposed audit of election administration

The League of Women Voters believes that voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed. We believe election administration should be adequately coordinated and funded to achieve both statewide standards uniformly applied and local municipal effectiveness. In approaching an audit of our state's election administration system, we urge you to consider the following:

The COVID-19 pandemic complicated the elections in April, August and November of 2020. It put our election administration system to the test, and now we have an opportunity to reflect on the challenges inherent in administering elections as well as some solutions that have been shown to work.

Our state and local election officials learned from the failures of the April election and rose to the challenge to make it possible for a record number of citizens in our state to cast a ballot and have it counted in November despite the pandemic. The April election was the first in the nation to take place under protective orders in the pandemic. There was little time to adapt, and there are many reports of mailed ballots that did not reach the voters or were not returned in time. Most of these problems had been addressed by the August election. The November 2020 election, in particular, was smoothly administered and had high voter participation. These changes/improvements were only possible because of the large influx of funding from the federal government and private grantors. We commend our state and local election officials for their long hours of diligent work, and we also recognize the efforts of thousands of citizens who assisted local clerks and worked at the polls.

After the 2016 election database security breaches across the country, election agencies were provided funding designated for security. This enabled the Wisconsin Election Commission to take action to improve security of our statewide systems and provide support to local officials. The WEC was called a "model partner" by MIT staff and election security experts for its response to this threat. Additional funding from the federal government greatly reduced the burden of upgrading equipment and improving training. Our elections will continue to be under threat and future budgets and administrations must continue to support the evolving security landscape.

While the challenges of 2020 were many, some unexpected positive outcomes included enhanced methods of voter outreach, including a mailing from the Wisconsin Elections Commission encouraging registered voters to request an absentee ballot, and a younger Election Day workforce. This year our municipal clerks offered multiple ways for citizens to vote safely and securely - from home, at In-Person Absentee Voting (IPAV) sites, or at the polls on Election Day. Knowing that many of the older poll workers were at higher risk for COVID-19, hundreds of younger community members stepped up and became election inspectors. We hope they will continue to serve in future elections.

The League had observers monitoring the voting process, including early voting, polling places, central count locations, post-election equipment audits, and the recount. As always, our observers commended the local election officials for creating a fair, efficient, and safe voting experience.

The election was secure and accurate. The recount in two counties found very few irregularities or problems, most of which were the result of human error. The audit found no evidence at all of widespread or systemic fraud in the election. Two Wisconsin State Journal reporters followed up on numerous allegations of irregularities that were received by lawmakers, and none of these allegations proved accurate. Indeed, the safeguards in our election system and our state's highly competent and responsible election officials are sufficient to ensure that our elections are fair and clean.

We can use what we have learned from elections during the pandemic to make voting more secure and accessible for all citizens in good times as well as bad. We recommend the following reforms to achieve this:

- Give the Wisconsin Elections Commission authority to create and require minimum training standards for poll workers across the state and a mechanism to ensure that training is completed.
- Implement Automatic Voter Registration to automatically update voter information whenever voters interact with the DMV. This would improve voter roll accuracy and ensure that Wisconsin has real-time address and name updates for voters.
- Expand access options to obtain a state ID for voting. Increase the options Wisconsin voters can use as forms of photo ID.
- Require risk limiting audits after each election.
- Allow voters to register to vote online whether or not they have a DMV product. This could be accomplished by allowing voters to upload a copy of their proof of residence document as they register on MyVote.
- Amend Wisconsin law to allow the Wisconsin Elections Commission to develop a screen-reader accessible, ADA compliant absentee ballot which can be electronically sent to the voter to allow voters with disabilities, including those who are blind or low vision, to vote privately and independently.
- Ensure that all who are living in residential care facilities are served by Special Voting Deputies (SVDs). In addition, expand the role of SVDs so they are dispatched to

facilitate voting for voters who are in jail and are eligible to vote. Provide additional funding to municipalities to ensure they are able to fund their use.

- Restore voting rights to those who are out of jail but are completing probation or are under supervision.
- Set a standard that ensures every municipality has a minimum number of polling locations within their community based on the size of the population, located in areas that can serve all populations in the municipality and allow voters to register and vote quickly and efficiently if they choose to vote in person on election day.
- Related to absentee voting -
  - Retain the provision for indefinitely confined voters to self-certify and to request absentee ballots without an ID.
  - Keep Wisconsin a no excuse absentee state and allow voters who are not indefinitely confined to be added to the permanent absentee list, so they do not need to re-request absentee ballots every year.
  - Continue to allow use of drop boxes.
- Counter misinformation by providing adequate funding to state and local election officials to produce and disseminate excellent voter information that is tailored to reach all voters in our diverse state population.

We urge lawmakers to reflect on the lessons of 2020 and use that knowledge to support the needs of our local election officials in their work to make it possible for every eligible citizen to register to vote, cast a ballot and have it counted.