

Modernizing Wisconsin's Elections

By Senator Devin LeMahieu

Do you have a valid state ID? Do you have access to the internet? Then you can register to vote. That's my vision behind the Elections Technology, Access, and Security Act which is gaining momentum in Madison. The bill, Senate Bill 295, creates online voter registration and a number of other important reforms to bring Wisconsin's elections into the 21st century.

The main impetus behind SB 295 is online registration. Now that the voter ID law is in place, voters should be able to register electronically using a valid driver's license or [free state ID](#) card. Registering online with your ID will also count as your proof of residency. Combined with our current practices of same day registration and in-person absentee voting, electronic registration will make it even easier for eligible citizens to register to vote in Wisconsin.

Another benefit of the SB 295 is that it will clean up Wisconsin's voter rolls. The bill would enroll Wisconsin into the Electronic Registration Information Center, or ERIC. ERIC is a non-profit organization run by a collection of member states to share voter data securely. Joining ERIC will provide Wisconsin with valuable information to help us identify duplicate registrations and voters that have moved, passed away, or are registered in neighboring states such as Illinois and Minnesota. Wisconsin would become the 16th state to join the ERIC database. Moving to ERIC will help Wisconsin cut costs, and curb the potential for registration errors and fraud.

The bill will also institute important technological advancements in Wisconsin's election administration. Specifically, SB 295 improves the process to use new electronic voting equipment, creates the option for electronic poll lists, and allows election workers to utilize the override function on voting machines instead of having to re-create a ballot by hand when a person over-votes. These advancements have been supported by county and municipal clerks and will increase the efficiency of our elections.

Additionally, the bill brings transparency and uniformity to the election process. Clerks will be required to routinely enter absentee ballot requests and early voters into a statewide database during the election cycle. Wisconsin is known for open and transparent government, this will add to our reputation.

One critique SB 295 has received is the elimination of Special Registration Deputies (SRD). SRDs are volunteer election officials that are deputized by local clerks. You may have seen them at voter drives, or knocking on doors in your neighborhood. Some have claimed that eliminating SRDs will disenfranchise voters. However, when you consider the entirety of the legislation that could not be further from the truth. The creation of online registration empowers everyone to go out into their communities and help citizens register to vote securely with a smartphone or tablet. Registering people to vote will no longer be limited to those deputized and trained by a municipal clerk.

Wisconsin is the only state that allow SRDs to verify a voter's proof of residence. There is no requirement that SRDs be unbiased, and many are often employed by highly partisan organizations from both sides of the aisle. Even the Brennan Center for Justice, a liberal non-profit, believes SRD laws should be eliminated because they "sow confusion and deter widespread participation." SB 295 solves the need for SRDs by providing electronic voter registration.

The Elections Technology, Access, and Security act streamlines and updates the voting process to ensure that our electoral process is open and honest. Online registration and the other reforms established by SB 295 will greatly improve our current system, clean up our voter rolls, and modernize Wisconsin elections.

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