



WISCONSIN LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU

MEMORANDUM

TO: Senator Melissa Agard

FROM: Laura Felone, legislative analyst
Richard Loeza, senior legislative analyst

DATE: July 17, 2023

SUBJECT: Election and campaign finance law changes since 2011

You requested a list of all changes to election and campaign finance laws since the 2011 legislative session. The list below includes acts that made substantive changes to Chapters 5 through 12 of state statutes. The acts were identified using the Legislative Reference Bureau's *Summary of the Wisconsin legislative session* publications and the act indices of legislation on the legislature's website.

- 2011 Wis. Act [23](#) (AB [7](#))
 - The “Voter ID” law—provides, with certain exceptions, that an individual must present proof of identification in order to vote in an election. Includes changes to inform voters of the new requirements.
 - Requires voters to sign the poll list when voting in person.
 - Extends deadline to be a resident to vote from 10 to 28 days.
 - Eliminates the use of corroboration as an alternative to providing proof of residency when registering to vote.
 - Shortens the period for late registration and absentee voting in person before Election Day.
 - Prevents the General Accountability Board (GAB) from appointing special registration deputies.
 - Adds requirements to information that must be on registration form.
 - Allows clerks to update registration date later after an election, and allows restricted registration information to be shared with state government and law enforcement officials.
 - Shortens deadline for absentee ballot applications.
 - Allows hospitalized electors to authorize another person to sign for them.
 - Required clerks to email or fax ballots to absentee ballots, if able.

- Requires automatically sending absentee ballots to be discontinued if an elector does not return a ballot for a single election.
- Allows special voting deputies to assist voters in more locations.
- Eliminates straight ticket voting option for most voters.
- Requires inspectors to challenge voters who do not adhere to voting requirements.
- Shortens date at which election materials may be destroyed to 22 months in all cases.
- 2011 Wis. Act [32](#) (AB [40](#))—2011 budget
 - Eliminates the Wisconsin Election Campaign Fund and the Democracy Trust Fund, which provided grants to qualifying candidates for certain state offices to finance their campaigns.
 - Requires monies from sale of registration list be deposited in election administration fund.
- 2011 Wis. Act [39](#) (SB [150](#))
 - Requires municipalities to revise ward lines in accordance with redistricting plans.
 - Creates a special judicial panel to hear redistricting appeals.
- 2011 Wis. Act [43](#) (SB [148](#))
 - Legislative redistricting based on 2010 census.
- 2011 Wis. Act [44](#) (SB [149](#))
 - Congressional redistricting based on 2010 census.
- 2011 Wis. Act [45](#) (SB [115](#))
 - Changes the date of the presidential preference primary to the first Tuesday in April and changes the dates for related election occurrences in accordance with that date change.
- 2011 Wis. Act [62](#) (SB [259](#))
 - Creates elective office of comptroller for counties with population over 750,000.
- 2011 Wis. Act [75](#) (SB [116](#))
 - Changes the date of the September primary election to the second Tuesday in August and renames it the partisan primary; also changes dates for related election occurrences.
- 2011 Wis. Act [115](#) (SB [381](#))
 - Changes the dates for completion of municipal and county canvasses to accommodate absentee ballots that are received after election night and provisional ballots.
 - Changes the deadline to petition for a recount.
 - Changes the date on which the terms of town officers begin, and changes the authorized dates for holding the annual town meeting.
- 2011 Wis. Act [227](#) (SB [271](#))
 - Provides, with limited exceptions, that if an elector personally delivers an absentee ballot to the municipal clerk, the clerk may not return the ballot to the elector and the elector may not vote in person at a polling place on Election Day.

- Requires every elector to submit proof of identification when applying for an absentee ballot unless the elector is exempted.
- 2011 Wis. Act [240](#) (SB [386](#))
 - Eliminates a requirement that public high schools, and certain private and tribal high schools upon their request, be used for voter registration of students and staff.
- 2013 Wis. Act [146](#) (SB [324](#))
 - Modifies in-person absentee voting so that applications may not be received on a legal holiday and may otherwise be received only from Monday to Friday between the hours of 8 a.m. and 7 p.m. each day.
 - Requires the municipal clerk to witness the certificate of any in-person absentee ballot cast.
- 2013 Wis. Act [147](#) (SB [20](#))
 - Permits the Milwaukee Board of Election Commissioners and the designated local government official in any other municipality to appoint as an election official at a polling place a qualified elector of a county within which the municipality is located (instead of just the ward or election district). Only the chief inspector at a polling place must be a qualified elector of the municipality.
- 2013 Wis. Act [148](#) (SB [377](#))
 - Requires the municipal clerk or board of election commissioners to report to the GAB statistic on postcards sent to verify an elector's voter registration information.
- 2013 Wis. Act [149](#) (SB [548](#))
 - Transfers responsibility for the biennial review of voter registration lists from the municipal clerk or board of election commissioners of each municipality to the GAB.
 - Requires the GAB to compile and post on its Internet site certain statistical information related to those electors to whom a notice of suspension was mailed.
- 2013 Wis. Act [153](#) (SB [655](#))—makes several changes to the campaign finance and lobbying laws, including:
 - Eliminating the limit on expenditures made to solicit contributions.
 - Allowing a registrant to file reports electronically.
 - Increasing registration thresholds, and extending the time during which a lobbyist may make a campaign contribution.
 - Specifies types of Internet activity that are subject to and excluded from disclosure requirements and contribution limitations.
 - Allows certain individuals and organizations to redirect certain campaign contributions made to the individual or organization but unclaimed for two years.
- 2013 Wis. Act [155](#) (AB [89](#))
 - Modifies the procedure for reporting election returns so that, in municipalities with a population of 35,000 or more, returns for small wards may be combined with the returns from an adjacent ward.

- 2013 Wis. Act [159](#) (AB [396](#))
 - Requires the municipal clerk or board of election commissioners of each municipality to send two special voting deputies to each community-based residential facility, adult family home, and residential care apartment complex located in the municipality. Requires the deputies to conduct absentee voting in person for those occupants who wish to vote.
- 2013 Wis. Act [160](#) (AB [420](#))
 - Provides that a signature on a nomination paper is not valid unless the signer legibly prints his or her name next to his or her signature.
- 2013 Wis. Act [169](#) (AB [565](#))
 - Repeals schedule of election occurrences from Subchapter II of Wis. Stat. Ch. [10](#).
- 2013 Wis. Act [174](#) (AB [606](#))
 - Lowers the number of signatures required for nomination papers for second- and third-class city offices for alderpersons who are not elected from aldermanic districts.
- 2013 Wis. Act [176](#) (AB [24](#))
 - Allows the board of canvassers to conduct an election recount by hand, unless a court orders a recount using some other method.
- 2013 Wis. Act [177](#) (AB [202](#))
 - Requires the chief inspector at a polling place and the municipal clerk at a location where absentee voting takes place to designate areas for members of the public to observe electors. Election observers must enter names in a log.
- 2013 Wis. Act [178](#) (AB [419](#))
 - Provides that write-in votes for (unregistered candidates) an election are counted only if no candidates are certified to appear on the ballot.
- 2013 Wis. Act [179](#) (SB [262](#))
 - Requires election officials to label overvoted, damaged, and duplicate ballots on that portion of the ballot designated for official endorsement.
- 2013 Wis. Act [180](#) (SB [264](#))
 - Requires that ballot containers must be secured by the chief inspector and, if available, one other inspector whose party affiliation is different from that of the chief inspector.
- 2013 Wis. Act [181](#) (SB [265](#))
 - Requires the chief inspector to assign, insofar as possible, an equal number of inspectors from each party to perform election functions.
- 2013 Wis. Act [182](#) (SB [267](#))
 - Requires each elector other than a military elector or an overseas elector to provide proof of residence when he or she registers to vote.
 - Requires the recording of certain information about the document presented as proof of residence.

- 2013 Wis. Act [373](#) (AB [613](#))
 - Designates the county clerk as the chief election officer in each county and as executive director of the board of election commissioners in populous counties. Also revises the duties of the county clerk.
- 2015 Wis. Act [2](#) (SB [6](#))
 - Requires the Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC) to present election investigation records to the Legislative Audit Bureau.
- 2015 Wis. Act [36](#) (SB [96](#))
 - Alters the threshold where a candidate who petitions for a recount need not pay a fee for the recount.
- 2015 Wis. Act [37](#) (SB [121](#))—makes various election law changes, including:
 - Requiring a write-in candidate to file a registration statement in order for write-in votes for that candidate to be counted
 - Providing that a municipal board of canvassers need not reconvene if the municipal clerk certifies that he or she has received no provisional or absentee ballots after the initial canvass.
 - Providing that a school board referendum held in conjunction with a regular election must take place at the same polling place and during the same hours as the regular election.
 - Minor changes related to direct legislation petitions, stickers on ballots, and town caucuses.
- 2015 Wis. Act [39](#) (SB [71](#))
 - Provides that a municipal clerk may perform the registration duties of an election inspector, unless the clerk is a candidate on the ballot for that election.
- 2015 Wis. Act [55](#) (SB [21](#))—2015 budget
 - Gives the Legislative Technology Services Bureau (LTSB) responsibilities related to the compilation of municipal ward data.
- 2015 Wis. Act [117](#) (AB [387](#))
 - Repeals and rewrites Chapter 11 of the Wisconsin Statutes on campaign finance, making several changes.
 - For a description of these changes, please see the Wisconsin Legislative Council’s information memorandum on the topic: “[State Campaign Finance Law: Major Provisions of 2015 Wisconsin Act 117.](#)”
- 2015 Wis. Act [118](#) (AB [388](#))
 - Eliminates GAB and replaces it with the WEC, which administers and supervises elections, and the Ethics Commission, which administers and supervises ethics, campaign financing, and lobbying regulation.
- 2015 Wis. Act [154](#) (SB [707](#))
 - Prohibits a legislator from holding office concurrent with holding office as county executive for more than 60 days.

- 2015 Wis. Act [209](#) (SB [47](#))
 - Requires a municipal clerk to send an elector an absentee ballot within one business day after receiving the elector’s request for the ballot.
- 2015 Wis. Act [229](#) (SB [391](#))
 - Requires an election official to attend a training program every two years.
 - Changes the date a term of a member of the board of canvassers begins.
- 2015 Wis. Act [261](#) (SB [295](#))—makes various election law changes, including:
 - Allows an individual with a current state driver’s license or identification card to register online to vote.
 - Allows an individual to use a veterans identification card as a voter ID.
 - Allows occupants of residential care facilities to use intake documents as proof of residence for voter registration.
 - Eliminates special registration deputies and creates election registration officials.
 - Permits testing chief inspectors.
 - Makes WEC and Ethics Commission members subject to standards of conduct for state public officials and filing statements of economic interest clarified.
 - Places limits on political action committee contributions to certain segregated funds and campaign contributions for other persons established.
 - Requires absentee ballots to be submitted by 8:00 p.m. on Election Day.
 - Adds to the information that must be input into official registration list.
 - Sets deadlines for municipalities and counties to report election returns.
 - Requires WEC Administrator to enter into agreement with the Electronic Registration Information Center, Inc. (ERIC) for the purpose of maintaining the official registration list.
 - Eliminates voter registration transfers.
 - Minor changes related to ballot overvotes and voter registration.
- 2015 Wis. Act [356](#) (SB [488](#))
 - Creates an address confidentiality program, including a voter confidentiality program, for victims of abuse, stalking, and human trafficking.
- 2015 Wis. Act [372](#) (AB [624](#))
 - Eliminates referenda provisions related to prohibiting the issuing of liquor licenses.
- 2017 Wis. Act [59](#) (AB [64](#))—2017 budget.
 - Amends school districts calling a special election.
 - Changes the WEC’s per diem to \$27 for each day on which a member attends or participates in the meeting of the WEC.
 - Allows the Department of Transportation to share information with the WEC to comply with Wisconsin’s membership in the Electronic Registration Information Center.
 - Requires the WEC to deplete federal Help America Vote Act funds before using state funds for election administration purposes.

- 2017 Wis. Act [120](#) (AB [153](#))
 - Allows a candidate to petition for a recount if the candidate trails the leading candidate by no more than 1 percent of the total votes cast for the office sought by the candidates. The act also increased the per diem compensation for a member of the WEC from \$27 to \$115 for each day on which the member attends or participates in a meeting of the WEC.
- 2017 Wis. Act [226](#) (SB [488](#))
 - Adds an identification card issued by federally recognized Indian tribe in the state to acceptable proof of elector's residence documents.
- 2017 Wis. Act [321](#) (AB [332](#))
 - Changes the signature requirement for nomination of candidates to school board in school districts that contain territory lying within a second class city.
- 2017 Wis. Act [326](#) (AB [85](#))
 - Allows an individual holding a local public office to serve as an election official without having to vacate his or her office.
- 2017 Wis. Act [360](#) (AB [840](#))
 - Requires LTSB to reconcile and compile municipal boundary information for purposes of a statewide database twice a year instead of once every ten years.
- 2017 Wis. Act [369](#) (SB [884](#))
 - Modifies absentee ballot procedures for overseas and military electors. The act also added unexpired identification cards issued by a technical college included in the Wisconsin technical college system as a valid form of identification for voting purposes.
- 2019 Wis. Act [48](#) (AB [168](#))
 - Allows an election official or another person selected by a voter to state the voter's name and address at the polling place on the day of an election if the voter is unable to do so.
- 2019 Wis. Act [164](#) (SB [108](#))
 - Clarifies that a vacancy in an elective office in a city or village may be filled for the residue of the unexpired term or until a special election is held or the office may remain vacant until an election is held.
- 2019 Wis. Act [182](#) (SB [422](#))
 - Provides that, if there is no candidate in an election who may petition for a recount, the certificate of election certifying the winner of the election may be issued immediately after the votes have been canvassed.
- 2019 Wis. Act [185](#) (AB [1038](#))
 - Waives communication limitations under existing campaign finance law regarding communications made during or within 30 days after the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency declared on March 12, 2020.

- 2021 Wis. Act [33](#) (SB [52](#))
 - Requires public notice when an incumbent local elected official is not running for reelection,
- 2021 Wis. Act [34](#) (SB [102](#))
 - Allows a pupil who is 16 or 17 years of age and enrolled in a home-based private educational program to serve as a poll worker (preexisting law applied only to students enrolled in a public or private school or in a tribal school).
- 2021 Wis. Act [38](#) (SB [208](#))
 - Requires the WEC, no later than 48 hours after each meeting, to post on its Internet site the minutes of each meeting conducted by WEC, along with a summary of all actions taken by each member of WEC at the meeting.
- 2021 Wis. Act [265](#) (SB [718](#))—implements campaign finance changes recommended by the Wisconsin Ethic Commission:
 - Expands the definition of “conduit.”
 - Provides that only a committee required to register and file with the Ethics Commission must pay the \$100 filing fee.
 - Increases the calendar year threshold for filing a statement of limited activity to \$2,500 and clarified the procedures for a committee filing a statement of limited activity.
 - Modifies the reporting requirement for late contributions so that contributions within 14 days of a primary or election must be reported within 72 hours of receipt.
 - Repeals the requirement that a committee report any donation to a charitable organization or the common school fund no later than five days after making the donation and provide an explanation as to why the committee did not retain the amount donated.
 - Modifies the periods during which contribution limits apply.
 - Requires that any communication supporting or opposing a referendum that is paid for by any contribution or disbursement identify its source.
 - Minor changes related to campaign finance report deadlines, candidate committee recordkeeping, express advocacy reporting, and late contribution reporting.

As of July 14, 2023, there have not been any acts pertaining to elections or campaign finance in the 2023 session.

If you have any questions about this memo or require any additional information, feel free to call Richard Loeza at 608-504-5890 or email at richard.loeza@legis.wisconsin.gov. Laura Felone can be reached at 608-504-5889 or at laura.felone@legis.wisconsin.gov.