

State of Wisconsin\Government Accountability Board

212 East Washington Avenue, 3rd Floor
Post Office Box 7984
Madison, WI 53707-7984
Voice (608) 266-8005
Fax (608) 267-0500
E-mail: gab@wisconsin.gov
<http://gab.wi.gov>



JUDGE MICHAEL BRENNAN
Chair

KEVIN J. KENNEDY
Director and General Counsel

Early Voting Final Draft Report An Examination of Early Voting in Wisconsin

Report Synopsis

Following the November 2008 presidential election, the Government Accountability Board (The Board) noted concerns from voters, elected officials, and election administrators, as well as critical editorials, on the inefficiencies experienced with in-person absentee voting. In particular, election administrators felt overwhelmed with managing in-person absentee applications and ballot logs before Election Day, while voters complained of long lines at in-person absentee voting sites. In addition, municipalities complained that processing large amounts of in-person absentee envelopes caused delays in counting absentee ballots on Election Day.

As a result of these inefficiencies experienced with in-person absentee voting, the Board Director and General Counsel assigned staff to investigate early voting as a possible remedy. This investigation resulted in a 16 page in-depth analysis, entitled "An Examination of Early Voting in Wisconsin," which reported on the best practices and impacts of early voting in states that have already adopted early voting. The analysis also contained three general proposals of how Wisconsin might implement early voting while retaining Wisconsin's traditions of same day voter registration and municipal control of elections. The proposal included establishing regional districts to conduct early voting (*Option A*), allowing municipalities to opt into early voting as desired (*Option B*), and streamlining the current in-person absentee voting procedures at the municipal clerk's office (*Option C*).

The Board accepted staff's analysis on March 31, 2009 and charged them to conduct a series of listening sessions throughout the state to gauge the opinion of the public, municipal clerks and county clerks on early voting. In response to this charge, eight listening sessions were scheduled between July 7, 2009 and August 13, 2009 with municipal and county clerks and the public. Additional meetings were also held with the League of Women Voters and with Milwaukee Area Labor Council representatives.

Based on these series of listening sessions, and the examinations of early voting procedures in other states, G.A.B. staff makes this final report on early voting in Wisconsin to the Board. Staff recommends in the report that the Board maintain in-person absentee voting and pursue procedures that will streamline in-person absentee balloting.