



WISCONSIN ELECTIONS COMMISSION

Administering Wisconsin's Election Laws

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Absentee Ballot Return Options - COVID-19

Priority

Timely Attention Required

Date

March 31, 2020 - 12:30pm

To

Wisconsin County Clerks
 Wisconsin Municipal Clerks
 City of Milwaukee Election Commission
 Milwaukee County Election Commission

From

Meagan Wolfe, Administrator

Attachment	Size
Ballot Return Options 3.31.2020.pdf	187.19 KB

Due to the increase in by-mail absentee ballots, clerks have inquired about options for ensuring that the maximum number of ballots are returned to be counted for the April 7, 2020 election. There are several options clerks can use to make ballot return more accessible and efficient. If a municipality chooses to do alternate drop off boxes or locations for ballots it should be publicized to voters where they can go to deliver their ballots. It's recommended that clerks also do the best that they are able to publicize drop off locations and options for voters. It is further recommended that it be publicized to voters that under state law, ballots need to be received by 8pm on election day to be counted.

1. Can I establish drop boxes, or other similar options, for voters to return ballots without having to mail them back?

Yes, drop boxes can be used for voters to return ballots but clerks should ensure they are secure, can be monitored for security purposes, and should be regularly emptied. Clerks can also use mail slots at municipal facilities when residents submit tax or utility payments for the return of ballots. These slots should be regularly monitored, and ballots should be collected on a daily basis. Clerks can also use book return slots at municipal libraries for this purpose as well as long as clerk staff have regular access to

these facilities to collect ballots on, at least, a daily basis. If there is a final time that ballots will be collected from a drop box location, it should be posted clearly on the drop box when the last pick up will occur to deliver the ballots to the polling place to be counted.

2. Can voters return an absentee ballot they received by mail in-person at the clerk's office, in-person absentee site or their polling place on election day?

Yes, a voter can hand deliver an absentee ballot they received by mail to the clerk. Ballots can be returned to the clerk's office, an in-person absentee (or early voting) site or the voter's polling on election day. A family member or another person may also return the ballot on behalf of the voter. Voters who received their ballot by mail and do not have access to a witness could potentially appear at the clerk's office or in-person absentee site to vote their ballot and have the clerk or clerk staff serve as a witness for the voter.

The deadline for voters to return their ballot is 8:00pm on Election Day. If you are receiving ballots at the clerk's office or other places, you should ensure that there be a collection at 8:00pm to be delivered to the polling place to be counted. If you are not accepting delivery at a central location, like the clerk's office or other city hall, it is advised that a notice be posted letting voters know where to deliver their ballots by 8pm to be counted.

3. Can mail be held by the local U.S. Postal Service station for pick up by the clerk?

Clerks can coordinate with their local postmaster to have their election mail held on and around election day rather than having it delivered to them by the mail carrier. This process would limit the time ballots are out for delivery, can ensure the clerk has access to all ballots returned by election day and could lead to more efficient delivery of those ballots to the polling place or central count facility for counting.

Interested clerks can contact their local postmaster directly to discuss available options for holding election mail on and around election day for pickup.

4. Can the U.S. Postal Service keep election mail local and not send it to central facilities for processing?

It may be possible to have election mail kept local and not sent to central processing facilities (Milwaukee, Twin Cities), but that requires coordination with the postal service. If this practice is possible it would potentially cut down on the transit time for ballots returned by mail to the clerk's office. Clerks interested in this option should contact their local postmaster directly to discuss these options.

5. Can municipal clerks include a notice of the ballot receipt deadline and drop off locations with ballots that are sent?

Yes. As an attachment to this email, please find a template that you can use to send with absentee ballots to alert voters to alternate drop off sites and of the deadline of 8pm on Election Day for ballots to be received. Please customize any items or remove/add bullet points as they apply to your jurisdiction. Please contact us with any questions you may have about these options at elections@wi.gov or (608) 261-2028.

Template Clerks Can Customize to Send With Absentee Ballots

[Your municipality] Voter,

To ensure that your absentee ballot is received by the deadline to be counted of 8:00pm April 7, we ask you to please consider the following:

- Hand deliver your completed absentee ballot in the completed certificate envelope to your [municipal clerk's office, city hall, etc.] or to your polling place at [enter polling place] by 8:00 pm on April 7.

Visited 09/24/2020

- You may drop off your voted ballot and your completed certificate at the drop box located at [drop box locations]. The last pick up from this box for delivery to the polls will be [date and time].
- If you are considering mailing your ballot back, please do so as soon as possible. The U.S. Postal Service advising that in some locations mail delivery can take between 2-7 days.

Thank you again for your participation in the April 7 election. If you have any questions, please contact [clerk contact information].

[clerks](#)

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Toll-Free Voter Help Line: 1-866-VOTE-WIS