

Co-sponsorship Memo for AB-609

TO: All Legislators
FROM: Representative Eric Genrich, Representative Terese Berceau and Senator Dave Hansen
RE: Co-sponsorship of LRB 4289/1: The Strengthening Democracy Act
DATE: September 26, 2017
DEADLINE: Thursday, October 13, 2017 5:00 PM

Today, we celebrate National Voter Registration Day with the introduction of legislation that enables universal voter registration. Never has it been clearer that free, open, and fair elections are the essential element to a successful and representative government in Wisconsin. The best way to ensure representative government is by enabling and encouraging full participating in the electoral process. With today's technology and the integration of DOT records, an electronic voter registration system would provide an accountable, secure, and modern method to register voters.

The bill implements the recommendation of the bipartisan Presidential Commission on Election Administration<<https://bipartisanpolicy.org/the-presidential-commission-on-election-administration/>> that "States should seamlessly integrate voter data acquired through Departments of Motor Vehicles with their statewide voter registration lists." This would be implemented through a new electronic voter registration system, which unites the Department of Transportation driver registration files and the State Election Commission's voter file to allow for automatic voter registration. As is required by current law, no voter will be added to the roll automatically without first confirming the registration is correct via electronic signature, US mail or in person. Under the bill, the elections commission must attempt to facilitate the initial registration of all eligible electors no later than July 1, 2021.

As a part of the creation of a modern electronic registration system, voters will also now be able to register online up to 20 days before an election if they were not previously registered by the automatic system. By streamlining and modernizing the registration process, municipal clerks, the elections commission, and the DOT can increase the efficiency and accuracy of voter registrations. According to a study by the PEW Center on the States <http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2012/pewupgradingvoterregistrationpdf.pdf>, the significant costs of updating and maintaining a current voter registration system can be lowered by using DOT data and an electronic registration system.

This bill requires the elections commission to present a report by July 1, 2019 concerning its progress in initially implementing the registration program created by the bill. This report would contain an assessment of the feasibility and desirability or integration of registration information with information maintained by the departments of health services, children and families, workforce development, revenue, regulation and licensing, and natural resources, the University of Wisconsin System, and the State Technical College System Board, as well as with the technical colleges in each technical college district. These additional data sources would strengthen the system even further by providing more ability to cross-reference and verify information as well as register more voters.

Ten states and the District of Columbia have already enacted similar legislation. The people of Wisconsin deserve access to similarly high quality, modern election system that encourages participation from the largest number of voters. The Election Modernization Act will begin the process of encouraging maximum participation in our

elections in an accountable and secure manner.

This legislation is supported by the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin, Common Cause Wisconsin, and WI Voices.

If you would like to co-sponsor LRB 4289/1 please respond to this e-mail or call Rep. Genrich's office at 266-0616 by Friday, October 13 at 5:00PM.

Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau

This bill requires the Elections Commission to use all feasible means to facilitate the registration of all eligible electors of this state and to maintain the registration of all eligible electors for so long as they remain eligible, except as the law specifically requires electors to take some action to continue their registrations.

Under the bill, the commission must attempt to facilitate the initial registration of all eligible electors no later than July 1, 2021. To facilitate the initial registration, the bill directs the commission and the Department of Transportation to enter into an agreement so that DOT may transfer specified personally identifiable information in DOT's records to the commission. The bill requires the commission to maintain the confidentiality of any information it obtains under the agreement and allows a driver's license or identification card applicant to "opt out" of DOT's transfer of this information to the commission. Once the commission obtains all the information required under current law to complete an elector's registration, the commission adds the elector's name to the statewide registration list. The information then becomes accessible on the Internet. The bill also permits an individual whose name is added to the registration list or who wishes to permanently exclude his or her name from the list to file a request to have his or her name deleted or excluded from the list or to revoke a deletion or exclusion request previously made. A deletion or exclusion request or revocation of a deletion or exclusion request may be made in the manner prescribed by the commission. In addition, the bill directs the commission to notify an individual by first class postcard whenever the commission removes his or her name from the registration list or changes his or her status on the list from eligible to ineligible.

The bill also directs the elections commission to report to the appropriate standing committees of the legislature, no later than July 1, 2019, concerning its progress in initially implementing the registration system created by the bill. The report must contain an assessment of the feasibility and desirability or integration of registration information with information maintained by the departments of health services, children and families, workforce development, revenue, regulation and licensing, and natural resources; the University of Wisconsin System; and the Technical College System Board, as well as with the technical colleges in each technical college district.

Under current law, a qualified elector with a current and valid driver's license or identification card issued by DOT may register to vote electronically on a secure Internet site maintained by the elections commission. To register electronically under current law a qualified elector must also authorize DOT to forward a copy of his or her electronic signature to the commission. The authorization affirms that all information provided by the elector is correct and has the same effect as a written signature on a paper copy of the registration form. Finally, current law requires the commission and DOT to enter into an agreement that permits the commission to verify the necessary registration information instantly by accessing DOT's electronic files.