



Tony Evers

Office of the Governor | State of Wisconsin

August 10, 2021

TO THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE SENATE:

I am vetoing Senate Bill 204 in its entirety.

This bill would make a series of changes to the process of applying for and receiving an absentee ballot, including new signature requirements for applications, restrictions on automatically receiving absentee ballots, and prohibitions on sending absentee ballots or applications before they are requested by voters, among others.

I am vetoing this bill because I object to the significant and unnecessary changes this bill would implement that would make absentee voting more difficult and result in the disenfranchisement of voters across Wisconsin. Current law requires proof of identification when you first apply to vote absentee (and thereafter only if the information changes), and the signature requirement is met when a voter signs the ballot envelope to confirm they wanted to vote absentee. This bill would complicate this process in several ways. The bill requires the Elections Commission to create a new form for applying to vote absentee, would require copies of voter identification each time, regardless of changes, and would require a signature separate from the ballot envelope for each application. Further, eligible electors could no longer apply to receive absentee ballots for all elections in a calendar year but rather would need to apply to have absentee ballots sent for each individual primary and its associated election. And clerks could not send an absentee ballot application prospectively. Under this bill, most individuals interested in voting absentee in multiple election cycles would need to repeatedly send in an application and copies of their voter identification throughout the year, even if their information and identification had not changed. This proposed burdensome process is clearly designed to make it more difficult to vote absentee.

The bill also would pose significant new burdens to voters who are indefinitely confined because of age, physical illness, infirmity, or disability—in fact it removes all indefinitely confined voters who applied for absentee ballots between March 12, 2020, and November 3, 2020. While indefinitely confined voters would be able to apply and receive absentee ballots automatically for the entire year, the bill layers on new requirements for the absentee ballot application process, requiring proof of identity or a statement from a U.S. adult citizen affirming identity, and adds another separate form and annual application process for people to qualify as indefinitely confined. The bill also directs a clerk to end such a voter's receipt of absentee ballots if the voter chooses to not vote in an election or primary or if the clerk receives "reliable information" that the voter is not actually indefinitely confined. Requiring people who are disabled, elderly, or infirm to fill out separate applications every year for both absentee ballots and to qualify as indefinitely confined and repeatedly forcing them to either obtain identification or find people to attest to their identity is overly burdensome to both voters and clerks. This bill would only greatly complicate absentee voting for those who need absentee voting the most.

Finally, the bill contains a series of other objectionable, unnecessary changes which would result in more work for already overextended local election officials. For example, it requires clerks on election day to post hourly updates on the number of absentee ballots transmitted, returned, and counted. It also would not allow a clerk's initials on the absentee ballot to be preprinted or stamped. These changes create more work for officials but provide no benefit for ensuring our elections are free and fair.

The bill fails to provide meaningful additional security for elections, is likely to disenfranchise numerous voters, particularly in our most vulnerable populations, and makes the whole absentee voting process less efficient and less user-friendly, and all but guarantees the need for additional staff during elections.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tony Evers", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tony Evers
Governor