

FACTS ABOUT AB-203 ABSENTEE VOTING EFFICIENCY OPTION

What is the Absentee Voting Efficiency Option?

FACT: AVEO is legislation to allow in-person absentee voters to feed their own ballot into electronic voting equipment INSTEAD of placing their ballot inside an envelope.

Why do we need this process?

FACT: Not all communities will need or want to use this process, which is why it is optional. We know there are communities in the state that are experiencing a very large number of absentee ballots and of the total absentee ballots cast, 75-80% are being cast by voters who are appearing in-person to do so. Communities are experiencing as many as 60,000 absentee ballots. We also know there are communities who experience very few absentee ballots. Communities need to determine locally, based on their experiences as to their needs in serving their community of voters.

Why is using machines a better process to using envelopes?

FACT: We know absentee ballots rejected on Election Day, are not being counted or being remade by poll workers erroneously. The Stein recount in 2016 showed us over 11,000 errors in counting ballots. While this is a small percentage of the total ballots voted across the state, we know we could significantly improve if we allowed in-person absentee voters to feed their own ballots into the electronic voting equipment. The voter would be alerted by the machine and would correct the ballot error themselves. Who better than the voter to determine their ballot intent?

FACT: We know the expense of absentee balloting involves purchasing thousands and thousands of envelopes, staffing to manage thousands of envelopes; secure delivery of envelopes; staffing to open envelopes at polls or central count; leasing of additional equipment to process ballots in envelopes on Election Day. Treating an in-person absentee voter who is standing right before you as a mail process is inefficient and expensive. The act of allowing the voter to feed the ballot into an electronic voting machine eliminates 75-80% of envelopes, eliminates the cost of managing and opening those envelopes; eliminates the expense to lease additional equipment as municipalities could utilize equipment they already own that is just sitting there doing nothing in the weeks leading up to Election Day. The machine is tested no less than three times. It is secure and capable of holding ballots. Why aren't we using the expensive machines we own?

FACT: We know in communities where there are 10,000 – 60,000 absentee ballots being opened and fed into voting equipment on Election Day that delays in reporting results occur as poll workers work late into the evening or early morning to get the ballots in. If AB-203 were adopted, 75-80% of absentee ballots would already be scanned into the equipment by the voter themselves.

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Are the ballots counted early?

FACT: No, they are not. The electronic voting equipment used is the same certified equipment used on Election Day. Ballots are scanned into the equipment. The equipment records an optical image of the front and back of the ballot. **The ballots are NOT counted!** Just like on Election Day, tabulation does not occur until the close polls button is activated and the program goes through a tabulation process. The equipment holds the scan in memory until tabulation is activated. The paper ballots are kept in secure tamper evident ballot bags for the audit trail to the imaged record.

Is this process safe and secure?

FACT: Yes. The equipment is not connected to the internet and AB-203 has numerous safety precautions that must be met prior to and during use. The equipment must be publicly tested prior to use. The equipment's memory device must be sealed with a tamper evident seal and checked prior to use and at the conclusion of use daily. The Clerk must publicly notice the activity including notice to the two major political parties. AVEO voting must take place in the presence of at least two Election Officials not including the Voter or a Candidate for Office. Observers may be present. Ballots fed into the machine must be sealed inside tamper evident ballot bags and secured daily. The equipment must be secured in a double lock location when not in use. The municipal plan to utilize AVEO must be reviewed and certified by the Wisconsin Elections Commission prior to use. The municipality must suspend use of AVEO anytime security provisions detailed in AB-203 can't be met.

How long would this activity go on?

FACT: Each participating municipality would decide. There are state and federal laws pertaining to the times in which absentee voting may occur. There is also a federal court case involved. AB-203 does not promote any political agenda or strategy, but rather acknowledges the laws and court actions already in place. AB-203 is non-partisan and endorsed by various legislators of both parties. The Wisconsin Municipal Clerk's Association, a non-partisan, professional organization of Professional Municipal Clerks supports this common sense legislation. The arguments and questions of how long absentee voting can go on, has nothing to do with providing a secure, efficient process of scanning a ballot. AB-203 is about using a machine to hold the ballot instead of an envelope. Envelopes can be damaged, lost and tampered with. A ballot scanned into the equipment by the voter can't. AB-203 is a more secure process than the current envelope method.

Has there been a pilot of this process?

FACT: No, not yet. A pilot of the process can't be performed until the law provides for the process. We are in favor of a test pilot and have asked the Wisconsin Elections Commission to do so in several communities prior to using the process statewide. This is something they did

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when rolling out the electronic Badger Books which is also an optional program used in managing elections across the state.

Who is supporting this and how long have they been working on AVEO legislation?

FACT: The machines instead of envelopes concept began following the Presidential Election in 2016 when a group of Professional Municipal Clerks from Southeastern Wisconsin got together to talk about election issues and brainstorm solutions. The focus expanded to solicit feedback from Municipal Clerks, County Clerks, Political Parties, League of Women Voters, Wisconsin Elections Commission staff and other interested individuals. Members of the group partnered with a local Legislator to write the legislation. In 2018, the Wisconsin Municipal Clerk's Association officially offered their support of the bill. The bill was introduced during the 2017-2018 legislative session. A public hearing was held and the measure passed the committee on the assembly side but failed to be heard by the committee on the senate side. Legislation was re-introduced during the 2018-2019 session. A joint public hearing between both assembly and senate committees was held and the measure was recommended for scheduling on the floor. AB-203 was set to be considered but was removed from the October agenda when various individuals opposed to AVEO advanced a campaign of mis-information and mis-truths. The purpose of this FACT sheet is to set the record straight about AVEO (AB-203).

I have more questions. Who can I contact?

FACT: Wisconsin Professional Municipal Clerks are the best resource for information. This is because Professional Municipal Clerks are non-partisan, professionals whose work on this legislation was for the benefit of the residents in their communities. Your local Professional Municipal Clerk is responsible for Election Administration. We are not politicians or affiliated with political parties. We are Professional Municipal Clerks who take an oath to uphold the laws of the United States, the State of Wisconsin and our communities. This is not about politics or political strategies. We are caring, local professionals who, based on our expertise in Election Administration, are trying to implement common sense, secure processes to instill voter confidence and benefit the local tax-payer. We know the job and the processes including where there are issues.

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What can I do to help?

Contact your Wisconsin Assembly Representative and Senator and tell them you support AB-203 and encourage them to support it too!