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League Summary of Elections Bill Packages

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On Wednesday, September 24th, Representatives Scott Krug and Lee Snodgrass held a joint news conference in the State Capitol to lay out their individual proposals for election law changes. While the two legislators indicated they are not in agreement on all of the policies being proposed, they are looking to promote a civil dialogue about these proposals. The press conference may be watched on WisEye.

Rep. Scott Krug's Proposals

Four bills were discussed by Rep. Krug (R-Rome) during the news conference. One bill is currently introduced though is expected to be amended, while the other three proposals are expected to be released soon. Future editions of the League Legislative Bulletin will provide more detail on these proposals.

- **Absentee Ballots** - This proposal will include a reintroduction of Monday processing, a process utilized in 43 other states to allow absentee ballots to be processed the day before the election. Additionally, the proposal will include uniform standards for the use of absentee ballot drop boxes and security for these drop boxes. This legislation is also expected to include a requirement that municipalities provide 24/7 video surveillance.

- **Absentee Voting Hours** - 2025 Assembly Bill 312 and Senate Bill 304, authored by Rep. Krug and Sen. Cabral-Guevara (R-Appleton), require each city, village, and town to offer at least 20 hours of in-person absentee voting without an appointment in the 14 days before an election. These hours must be included in the Type E Election Notice published four weeks before an election. Rep. Krug stated that "elections security grants" will be added to this legislation.
  - The League has currently taken a position of undisclosed on this legislation. We've discussed the League's concerns regarding a uniform, statewide standard number of hours given the wide variety in the number of registered voters and staff capacity within cities and villages throughout the state. The League is seeking an amendment to the legislation.

- **Ballot Drawdowns** - When the number of ballots is greater than the voters that cast ballots, there is a ballot 'drawdown' where ballots are randomly eliminated. This may happen when an absentee ballot certificate is incomplete and eliminated but the ballot was already separated and counted or may happen due to other minor recordkeeping errors. Under the proposal, the statutory requirement for a drawdown in these instances would be eliminated and replaced with a 'risk-limiting audit' where a statistical sample is chosen, reviewed, and compared to the election results. If the sample is outside the margin of error, more ballots are counted until the post-election review results in a count that matches the overall results within the margin of error.

- **Election Observers** - The last proposal discussed by Representative Krug will establish a same-day process for a county clerk or their designee to resolve disputes between local election officials and election observers. Currently, these disputes are resolved by the Wisconsin Elections Commission, which may take weeks. This proposal also lowers the cost of obtaining the statewide voter list from $12,500 to $1,000.

Democrat Representatives' Proposals

Led by Rep. Lee Snodgrass (D-Appleton), the ranking member on the Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections, Democratic members of the Assembly unveiled a dozen proposals in the Voter Outreach, Training, and Engagement (V.O.T.E.) package. These proposals are circulating for co-sponsorship until Wednesday, October 1st before they may be introduced and given a bill number.

Elections Administration Proposals

- **Accessibility Training** - *Rep. Snodgrass (D-Appleton) and Sen. Ratcliff (D-Cottage Grove)* - This legislation requires all election officials, including municipal clerks and election registration officials, to attend one hour of training on voter accessibility hosted by the Wisconsin Elections Commission. This training would cover current law requirements to accommodate voters.

- **Ballot Marking** - *Rep. Snodgrass (D-Appleton) and Sen. Spreitzer (D-Beloit)* - Under current law, absentee ballots processed at a central count facility must be marked with the polling number, creating extra workload for local clerks and raising questions about voter anonymity. This legislation removes that requirement, meaning absentee ballots would no longer be marked.

- **Election Interference** - *Rep. Rivera-Wagner (D-Green Bay)* - This legislation establishes criminal penalties of up to nine months imprisonment and a fine of up to $10,000 for engaging in certain conduct that interferes with voting or election administration. The legislation also enhances penalties for harassment or stalking of persons engaged in voting or election administration.

- **Incomplete Absentee Ballot Certificates** - *Rep. Snodgrass (D-Appleton) and Sen. Smith (D-Brunswick)* - Under current law, a municipal clerk may return an absentee ballot with an incomplete certificate to the voter to correct the defects and return the ballot. This legislation requires municipal clerks to return those ballots to the voter if time permits this action.

- **Polling Place Accessibility** - *Rep. Snodgrass (D-Appleton) and Sen. Ratcliff (D-Cottage Grove)* - This legislation requires the Wisconsin Elections Commission to establish an election day accessibility checklist, a document that is already published. Any election official must notify the clerk or chief inspector if the checklist unveils any limitations for persons with accessibility challenges at a polling place. The legislation also requires the commission to provide uniform instructions on the placement of curbside voting signs for voters with accessibility challenges.

- **Ranked-Choice Voting** - *Reps. Rivera-Wagner (D-Green Bay) and Snodgrass (D-Appleton) and Sen. Larson (D-Milwaukee)* - Ranked-choice voting allows voters to rank the candidates in their order of preference rather than selecting just one candidate. Voters' top choice is counted first, and if no candidate receives 50% of the vote, the last-place candidate is dropped and if a voter selected the last-place candidate as their first choice, their next preference is counted. This process repeats itself until a candidate receives a majority of votes. This legislation allows municipalities to adopt ranked-choice voting for local elections if approved in a referendum.

- **State Officials Working in Elections** - *Rep. Snodgrass (D-Appleton) and Sen. Smith (D-Brunswick)* - This legislation requires that all non-judicial elected state officials must serve as an election official or poll worker in their first term and at least once every three years during their time as an elected official. The elected state official may not work as an election worker in any election where they're on the ballot. The elected state official also may not be compensated for their time and shall not count towards any municipal limit on the number of election officials.

Youth Voter Outreach Proposals

- **17-Year-Old Voting** - *Reps. Snodgrass (D-Appleton) and Palmeri (D-Oshkosh) and Sen. Roys (D-Madison)* - This legislation allows 17-year-olds that are otherwise eligible electors to vote in a primary election if the voter will turn 18 before the general election following that primary. As noted by a nonpartisan Legislative Reference Bureau attorney, the proposal will require an amendment to the Wisconsin Constitution regarding eligible electors before it may become law.

- **Voter Preregistration** - *Reps. Snodgrass (D-Appleton), Palmeri (D-Oshkosh), and Krug (R-Rome) and Sen. Smith (D-Brunswick)* - This legislation would allow 16 and 17-year-olds who will become fully qualified electors at the age of 18 before election day to preregister to vote.

- **Voter Registration in High Schools** - *Reps. Rivera-Wagner (D-Green Bay) and Snodgrass (D-Appleton) and Sen. Smith (D-Brunswick)* - In 2011, a requirement to place special registration deputies in high schools was eliminated. This legislation reinstates that requirement and mandates at least one special registration deputy is appointed at all public high schools with an option for private high schools to have a special registration deputy if requested by the principal.

- **Youth Elections Education** - *Reps. Rivera-Wagner (D-Green Bay), Krug (R-Rome), Emerson (D-Eau Claire), and Snodgrass (D-Appleton)* - This legislation would require the Department of Public Instruction to develop a curriculum on the electoral process, importance of voting, and how to vote, and that at least one hour of voter education is taught every year in all K-12 grades.

- **Youth Voter Registration** - *Reps. Emerson (D-Eau Claire), Snodgrass (D-Appleton), and Rivera-Wagner (D-Green Bay) and Sen. Smith (D-Brunswick)* - This legislation requires that each school board in Wisconsin provides high school students that have become eligible to register to vote with a voter registration form and information on voting. Additionally, the school must provide students with nonpartisan materials on the importance of voting in elections.