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Governor Tony Evers  
State of Wisconsin  
PO Box 7863  
Madison WI 53707  
EversInfo@wisconsin.gov

Dear Governor Evers,

We are Wisconsin Municipal Clerks and Deputy Clerks. We would like to give you a view from the Clerk's perspective while involved in the April 7th election process.

We are in a rock and a hard place as we work for the upcoming election. Each of our 1854 municipalities will conduct the election separately for April 7<sup>th</sup> and are all in the current stage of sending out absentee ballots and helping people to vote in person at our offices, homes (there are some Clerks in small rural municipalities who have their office in their home) or other satellite sites. They are placing themselves and the voters in harm's way of the coronavirus. All while your office has issued a 'stay at home' order for non-essential workers.

Municipal Clerks take an oath of office to uphold their statutory duties. All of us take that oath and our duties VERY serious. We are among the most dedicated, conscientious and loyal local government workers you will ever find. Conducting the elections is a critical part of what Clerks do. We do all we can to make sure every voter not only has the opportunity to vote, but that their vote is counted. Many will go to extraordinary lengths, on their own time and dime, to help people provide what they need to register to vote or to receive an absentee ballot. This election is no different.

Clerks, Deputy Clerks, election staff and volunteers have been working 24/7 these past two weeks to register voters and mail absentee ballots out to everyone who has made a request. In doing so, all involved are putting themselves and their families at risk. Numerous voters come in to vote in-person absentee and yet they are compromised because of age or infirmity. Others come in to vote in-person, simply because they can, and they don't seem to take the threat of the virus serious. Unfortunately, this means putting others at risk, not just themselves.

Clerks are getting very creative in finding ways to conduct this election process with as little risk to themselves and voters. For example they are putting up plexiglass barriers, using bank style drive up windows for drive up voting, having workers stationed on the streets to meet voters at their vehicles to check their IDs and provide them the ability to vote absentee in their cars, providing hand sanitizer at every turn and spraying down the voting areas with disinfectant in between voters. This is provided we can GET those supplies to use. If we can't get them, some of us are making our own sanitizers and disinfectants when we can find the supplies to do so. Most of us cannot locate masks or gloves. Many of us are giving voters the pens they use, so we don't have to take them back and/or sanitize them for reuse.

During this past week I reached out to other Clerks in Wisconsin to find out if they or their family members are compromised in health. Within one day I received responses back from about 50 Clerks saying they or family members are compromised. Over 20 have signed this letter. Many of those Clerks have told me how they are continuing to conduct their absentee voting while:

- Going to the bathroom to vomit in between voters because they are sick but the only person in their office, they have no choice but to continue working.
- Continuing absentee voting even though they have just returned from cancer surgery, are being treated with radiation and/or chemotherapy, while their nurse daughters and their doctor beg them to stay home and be safe. Yet they are the only one in the office
- Moved their office to their home because they have Type 1 diabetes and their Mayor doesn't want them working. This while their husband has an artificial heart valve and heart issues.
- A Deputy Clerk who has diabetes and high blood pressure.
- A Clerk who has kidney disease, asthma and high blood pressure.
- Another whose spouse has had an organ transplant.
- Others with autoimmune diseases or those taking immunosuppressants.
- Several who themselves or family members are compromised with, COPD, cancer, chemo treatments, diabetes, asthma, heart issues, without kidneys, spleens and a host of other issues.
- One Clerk testimony stated her son has asthma and two teens work as CNA's in nursing homes, so the family is at extra risk. She was told by her county, if she gets sick, she must have a Deputy to conduct the election or it won't be legal. She's already set up her polling location in case she can't be there. Her community is a population of 600 and she does not have a Deputy Clerk. The person who helps when she is on vacation is now in Florida. 'So, if I get sick, I really at this point don't care about the election ..... "I am so disheartened by all of this I don't even want to be a Clerk any longer"

The State issued a 'stay at home' order, yet the Legislators insist this election go on as usual with in-person absentee voting between now and April 3<sup>rd</sup> and in person voting on Election Day April 7<sup>th</sup>. This is putting thousands of election workers at risk, who would otherwise be required to stay at home. The Legislators do not wish to consider any alternative such as the all-mail absentee voting process or allow a longer time period to return those ballots and a longer time period for those ballots to get counted. Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald says your suggestion to send an absentee ballot to every registered voter in Wisconsin is 'complete fantasy' and the Clerks in Wisconsin should know this.

This isn't about what Clerks should or shouldn't do because it is their duty, it is about what the CDC has been telling all of us all along. Be smart, be safe – stay at home/shelter in place – limit your exposure with safe distancing. Don't put yourself or others at risk.

I have always held myself to the highest level of honesty, integrity and ethics both personally and in my municipal position. My personal code is don't do it if it is illegal, unethical or unsafe. My understanding based on a presentation by the League of Wisconsin Municipalities Municipal Insurance at their seminar in 2019 is: *Per Wisconsin State Statute it is the general duty of an employer to provide a safe workplace. An employer is obligated to take all steps 'reasonably necessary' to protect life, health, safety and welfare of its employees. Employers are prohibited from failing or neglecting to take all reasonable actions necessary to protect the workplace. This general duty for safety is over and above the extensive specific safety regulations imposed by law.* Does this requirement get set aside when a State requires the election related employees of all municipalities in Wisconsin to put themselves at risk?

In every difficult election situation in my 32 years of local government service, we Clerks have found a way to make it happen again and again. We are known as Super Clerks. We are killing ourselves right now making this current situation work – for in person voting on April 7<sup>th</sup>. Why

can't we remain safe and continue working overtime to get absentee ballots out to every voter instead? Why are many of our Legislators so adamant that keeping the polls open for voting on April 7th is the ONLY way to do this? Are they putting themselves and their loved ones on the front lines by working the election themselves? I haven't heard of any of them signing up as a poll worker. I'd like to request you, Majority Leader Fitzgerald and all other State elected officials to set an example, along with your loved ones, and work with Clerks conducting in-person absentee voting and at the polls on Election Day. Only then may you all understand the choice being forced on voters and election workers.

Please work closely with WEC staff and Counsel to consider all options for the April 7<sup>th</sup> Election. Some of those might be: Postpone the entire election to a much later date (keeping in mind the 7<sup>th</sup> Congressional District has an election coming up on May 12<sup>th</sup>); Extend the dates for requesting and returning absentee ballots as well as time periods for them to be mailed out and counted at the end of the election.

Wouldn't all the equipment we are trying to procure to keep all election workers and voters safe on Election Day be better used by all the healthcare workers and emergency personnel putting themselves at risk? Is this election really the more important use for these items? If it is your loved one that loses this battle because they didn't have the right personal protective equipment (ppe) available, will you feel better that you and your election workers were able to use that equipment to vote in person on April 7<sup>th</sup>? Or will you wish that you had done all you could to give it to those in dire need instead?

Respectfully,



Barbara K. D. Goeckner MMC/WCPC, Deputy Clerk/Treasurer/Administrator

Rick Goeckner MMC, Interim Town Clerk

Diane Coenen CMC/WCMC, City Clerk

Jo Ann Lesser CMC/WCMC, Clerk/Treasurer

Elizabeth A. Miller, Deputy Clerk

Debbie Collins, Clerk/Treasurer

Maggi Jochem, Deputy Clerk

Cindy Howard, Deputy Clerk

Lynn M. Pepper WCMC, Town Clerk

Barbara Schuh, Clerk/Treasurer

Bill Heideman, City Clerk

Angie Copas, Village Clerk

Carmen Newman WCMC, Clerk/Treasurer

Jeri Lynne Wittmershaus, Village Administrator/Clerk/Treasurer

Barb Van Clake, City Clerk

Lori Brueggen, Village Clerk

Connie Gurtner MMC/WCMC/CMTW, City Clerk/Treasurer

Candee J. Christen WCMC, Deputy Clerk and Past Clerk

Debi Heisner, City Clerk

Teri Sayles, Deputy Clerk/Treasurer

Sharon Brooker, Clerk/Treasurer

Debra Doriott-Kuhnly, Clerk/Treasurer

Michelle Schramek, Clerk/Treasurer

Marla McIntyre, Deputy Clerk/Treasurer

Sam Liebert, Administrative Services Director/Clerk/Treasurer

Becky Tellier CMC/WCMC, Clerk/Treasurer

Kathy Burger WCMC, Municipal Clerk