

Tony Evers

Office of the Governor | State of Wisconsin

April 8, 2022

TO THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE SENATE:

I am vetoing Senate Bill 939 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.

The right to vote is fundamental to our democracy; it should not be subject to the whim of politicians who do not like the outcome of an election. Elected officials should not be able to abuse their power to cheat or control the outcomes of our elections or to prevent eligible voters from casting their ballots. This legislation is among many that have been sent to my desk during this legislative session, each passed under the guise of needing to reform our election system because elected officials in this state have enabled disinformation about our elections and election processes. I have and will object to each and every effort by this Legislature and its members to undermine our democracy, to erode confidence in our elections, and to demean and harass dedicated clerks, election administrators, and poll workers.

I am vetoing this bill in its entirety because I object to making absentee voting more difficult. The significant and unnecessary changes that this bill would impose would do nothing more than complicate an already working process and would result in the potential disenfranchisement of voters across Wisconsin.

Current law requires proof of identification when an individual first applies to vote absentee and thereafter requires the voter to resubmit proof only if the information changes. This bill would eliminate that common-sense exemption. The bill would also eliminate a voter's ability to request automatic receipt of absentee ballots for all elections occurring in the voter's municipality during the year of the application, instead requiring separate applications for each primary and associated election. As a result, under this bill, most individuals interested in voting absentee in multiple election cycles every year would need to repeatedly send in an application and a copy of their voter identification throughout the year, even if their information and identification had not changed. This proposed process lacks common sense, is unnecessarily burdensome, and is a ploy to make it more difficult to vote absentee.

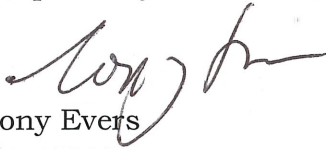
Second, this bill would prohibit election officials from sending an absentee ballot application prospectively. This is an unnecessary limitation on the process, and would not apply to political actors, who would be allowed to send out absentee ballot applications prospectively—an inconsistency that illustrates the ugly political underpinnings of this bill.

Third, the bill imposes additional restrictions regarding who may return a ballot on behalf of a voter. This bill would require that if a person does not return their own ballot, they must enlist the assistance of a registered voter in Wisconsin who is either an immediate family member, legal guardian, or another designated person in writing and that individual is limited to returning only two ballots for any election for persons who are not family members. These needless restrictions could significantly reduce the circle of people who an indefinitely confined voter could turn to for help with absentee voting. For example, the bill would not allow a 16-year-old grandchild to help their grandmother return her ballot simply because the grandchild is not old enough to vote. A trusted neighbor would be limited to helping only two elderly or infirm neighbors return their ballots, but not a third. Instead of improving the election system, this bill would complicate our current absentee voting requirements for those who need absentee voting the most.

In addition, 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 election officials to repeatedly process absentee ballot applications for every election, even though they will already have previously entered information from those voters. It would also not allow a clerk's initials on the absentee ballot to be preprinted or stamped. These changes do nothing to contribute to our already free and fair elections and are designed only to create more work for our election officials.

This bill fails to provide meaningful additional security for elections, is likely to disenfranchise numerous voters, and makes the absentee voting process less efficient and less user-friendly. For these reasons, I must veto it.

Respectfully submitted,



Tony Evers
Governor