

## Thousands of Wisconsin Absentee Ballots at Risk of Rejection

Written by League Women Voters WI, Andrea Kaminski  
Wednesday, 12 October 2016 09:54

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[http://newiproggressive.com/images/stories/S5/voters\\_line\\_s5.jpg](http://newiproggressive.com/images/stories/S5/voters_line_s5.jpg)



***Confusion stems from a measure passed last year, Act 261, which requires the rejection of absentee ballots with a missing witness address on the certificate envelope, but does not define what a “missing address” is. Nonpartisan election watchdogs ask State Elections Commission to take action.***

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MADISON - The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin and the Fair Elections Legal Network submitted a letter on Tuesday to the Wisconsin Elections Commission requesting they take swift action so thousands of absentee voters are not disenfranchised in the upcoming election. As of last week, approximately 400 completed ballots in Milwaukee and 200 in Racine were at risk of not being counted because of an “incomplete” witness address – often because the municipality was not recorded.

The confusion stems from a measure passed last year, Act 261, which requires the rejection of absentee ballots with a missing witness address on the certificate envelope. It does not define what a “missing address” is. An October 4 memo sent to local election officials from the Wisconsin Elections Commission stated a witness must include a street number, street name and municipality, but the absentee ballot certificate and instructions did not inform absentee voters that technical errors such as omitting a municipality would result in rejection. The new complete address policy was sent to the local clerks after absentee voting was already under way, so absentee voters were not given notice.

Since voting has only just begun, the number of ballots with witness addresses that contain a street address but no municipality will likely increase and it is up to local clerks to voluntarily contact voters to correct their absentee ballot submission. This is a challenge because most voters do not provide phone numbers or email addresses, and mailing the absentee ballots back to voters will delay notification and corrections. Ballots could be received up until Election Day, leaving little time to contact voters many of whom will be out of town. Since municipal clerks can easily figure out a municipality, contacting voters to resolve this issue is an unnecessary additional burden on top of the current preparations local elections officials are making less than 30 days from Election Day.

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The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin and the Fair Elections Legal Network are asking the Wisconsin Elections Commission to adopt a new policy for witness addresses on absentee ballots which would accept submissions that include a residential street address but lack the municipality name.

A lawsuit is being prepared in case the Wisconsin Elections Commission does not take action at this Friday's meeting.

[The letter delivered to the Wisconsin Elections Commission can be found here.](#)

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*The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin is a nonpartisan organization that advocates for informed and active participation in government.*

*The League welcomes women and men across the state as members.*

*With 18 local Leagues in Wisconsin and*

*800 affiliates across the country, the League is one of the nation's most trusted grassroots organizations.*

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*The Fair Elections Legal Network (FELN) is a national, nonpartisan election reform organization whose mission is to remove barriers to registration and voting for traditionally underrepresented constituencies and improve overall election administration through administrative, legal, and legislative reform.*