

**City of Racine, Wisconsin  
Office of the Mayor**



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March 25, 2020

Governor Tony Evers  
State Capitol  
115 East  
Madison, WI 53702

Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald  
State Capitol  
211 South  
Madison, WI 53702

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos  
State Capitol  
211 West  
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Governor Evers, Senate Majority Leader Fitzgerald, and Speaker Vos:

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, I am writing urgently to strongly encourage you to **call a special or extraordinary session - this week - to change the law to allow every voter in the State of Wisconsin to receive a ballot in the mail and delay the April 7 Spring Election by some reasonable period of time to facilitate that process.** I am aware that the Governor cannot act on this unilaterally, just as I cannot do so as Mayor. The best solution is quick legislative action signed into law by the Governor. As you know, the Governor could call a special session, or the Legislature could call themselves in through extraordinary session.

If there is any fixed star in our democracy it is that free and fair elections must occur to ensure the peaceful transfer of authority from one group of elected officials to the next. This has been the case throughout the history of our state—even in times of war. Equally important is our responsibility to keep our constituents safe from eminent threats that could jeopardize their lives; our first responders do that every day.

As a Mayor, I am watching these two sacred duties collide with one another. There is a contradiction in place here. How, in the midst of a statewide coronavirus “stay at home” order, do we simultaneously encourage millions of people to go out on April 7, stand in lines in close proximity, and cast a vote? There does not appear to be a safe way to conduct both of these activities simultaneously.

I think if you consulted local elected officials from across the state you would hear similar pleas.

Already the coronavirus is stretching election officials to their limits. Please consider changing the law to allow for the following:

- Every registered voter shall be mailed a ballot (municipalities would need time to print additional ballots and envelopes to accommodate this)

- Suspend the requirement that a photo ID be presented before a ballot can be mailed and returned (keep in mind all registered voters have shown a photo ID in the past to be able to vote)
- Witness requirements for the absentee ballots should be waived to maintain social distancing
- The actual Election Day would need to be postponed (perhaps 3-4 weeks) to allow a reasonable amount of time to facilitate this process
- Local jurisdictions shall be given authority to conduct the election in a way to maintain and enhance social distancing for people voting in person on Election Day (drive through voting is one example)
- This shall only apply to the Spring Election of 2020

If I had the authority to do this myself, I would have done so already. Unfortunately, the way the state statute is written, mailing everyone a ballot could render those ballots null and void. **It is why your action on this this week is so critically important.**

This change in the law would diminish substantially the need for people to in-person, early absentee vote or vote in person on Election Day itself. The additional time would give clerks around the state an opportunity to prepare.

There are places like Racine all over the state that are struggling with this. We have received a record number of absentee ballot requests. Of our nearly 34,000 registered voters, we typically mail ballots to 1500 voters. That number is now over 5500. However, that is still a small percentage of our voters.

The City's in-person, early absentee voting at this point is heroic. Voters are greeted by two public health officials who are wearing lab coats, gloves, masks, and protective eyewear. They ask voters to take their temperature. They then ask a series of questions about symptoms and the voter's ability to climb two flight of stairs. If the voter has a fever or any complications, the clerk staff conducts curbside voting. If the voter does not require curbside voting, they are directed to climb the stairs and stand in squares taped to the floor that are six feet apart. They then vote in one of our large conference rooms and the Council Chamber to maintain social distancing. After citizens vote they are directed to exit a different door.

Social distancing for in-person, early absentee voting is easier to maintain than on Election Day because we only get on average 12-15 voters an hour. Voters and staff are encouraged to wash their hands at the start and finish of this process. None of the staff inside the City Hall wear personal protective equipment; we simply do not have the supplies. The only operation in City Hall that has not been closed to person-to-person contact is the in-person, early absentee voting. All other City Hall operations are being conducted via phone and email.

**Simply put, we cannot replicate this on Election Day.** The City has 14 polling locations on Election Day; all with two to four wards voting at them. They are held in schools, community centers, and churches. Each polling location requires an chief election chief, a greeter, and three election officials (poll workers) to staff each ward. We need approximately 135 people, at minimum, to run an election effectively and to comply with the law.

Of our 135 regular poll workers, fewer than 25 of them are under the age of 60. Even before the "stay at home" order, we were losing poll workers. Now, I am concerned we will not be able to fully staff our election locations.

The ramifications to maintaining our current Election Day activities could have serious—even fatal—health consequences. The Election would occur right in the midst of our efforts to “flatten the curve” of coronavirus infections. The economic and healthcare related consequences could be dire.

I know there may be concerns about what these temporary changes could mean for photo ID laws in the long term. No doubt Republicans and Democrats will continue to see this issue differently. Permanently changing photo ID laws is not what this request is about. It is the only way to ensure registered voters who want to “stay at home” for this one election can do so safely and fairly.

There are other norms in our democracy that have already changed. Jury trials have been postponed. Face to face government services have been limited to over the phone or email. We can find a way to make changes to safely conduct an election.

Some are asking the courts to intervene on this. I applaud any efforts to seek relief for the situation in which we find ourselves. The better course of action is for the Legislature and Governor to intervene.

As a former legislator who served for 11 years before becoming Mayor, I watched the Legislature become more partisan and divided. But I have also seen the Governor and the Legislature put down their partisan swords to move quickly in the interest of the state we all love. This is one of those times. It is perhaps needed more now than it has been in a generation. Please act quickly – before it is too late.

In desperation,



Cory Mason  
Mayor  
City of Racine