

Office of the Mayor
Mayor Tom Barrett

City Hall, Room 201
200 E. Wells Street
Milwaukee, WI 53202

(414) 286-2200
mayor@milwaukee.gov



www.city.milwaukee.gov

Council President
Michael J. Murphy
10th District Alderman

City Hall, Room 205
200 E. Wells Street
Milwaukee, WI 53202

(414) 286-2221
mmurph@milwaukee.gov

March 21, 2014
Governor Scott Walker
115 East Capitol
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Governor Walker:

We request a veto of Senate Bill 324, limiting the times for voting by absentee ballots in person. The title of the bill says it all - limiting voting. Wisconsin has a proud tradition of civic engagement and high voter turnout. As elected officials, we should do everything in our power to encourage and promote citizen participation in all elections, and unfortunately this bill does quite the opposite. No political party should support policies that discourage voting. We are dismayed, to say the least, that the State Legislature would support such a blatant attack on voters' rights.

The authors of SB 324 have stated their intent is to have standardization of hours for in-person absentee voting between municipalities. Current law limits in-person absentee voting to one site per municipality. If the goal is truly about standardization, then the bill should allow more than one voting site per municipality based on population as is currently done on Election Day within the standardized hours of 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. The very real problem is that the bill does not address equal access and, in fact, disadvantages Milwaukee's early absentee voters while maintaining much more accessible early absentee voting in other communities.

The bill sets a maximum number of 45 hours rather than a minimum number of hours to be provided. Communities should be able to decide this for themselves based on their population and residents' needs. This is yet another infringement on local control by this legislature.

In Milwaukee, with a population of nearly 600,000 residents, we had 36,349 in-person absentee voters in 2012, representing 12.5% of voters. Delafield with only 7,100 residents has one of the highest rates of in-person absentee voting with 26%. Big Bend only had 114 in-person absentee voters. Under the bill, Milwaukee would have to process a ballot every 9 seconds; Delafield every 5 minutes; and Big Bend every 48 minutes.

In large municipalities, the clear effect will be to limit access to the polls for voters. It will limit access for the demographics that most vote in-person absentee: the disabled and elderly, working and single parents, those with transit needs, and African-Americans and Latinos. It will just lead to overcrowding at the polls on Election Day, thereby causing limited access for all voters. Florida's experience enacting, and then repealing a similar law is a lesson we should all learn from.

SB 324 is yet another bill impacting voters that may end up in the courts. Let's avoid a long, drawn out process. We urge you to do what is right - veto this bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Mayor Barrett



Common Council President
Michael J. Murphy



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