



December 9, 2021

VIA EMAIL

Public Records Requests
Wisconsin Elections Commission
212 East Washington Avenue, Third Floor
P.O. Box 7984
Madison, Wisconsin 53707-7984
elections@wisconsin.gov

Re: Public Records Law Request

Dear Public Records Officer:

Pursuant to Wisconsin's public records law, Wis. Stat. §§ 19.31–19.39, American Oversight makes the following request for copies of records.

Requested Records

American Oversight requests that the Wisconsin Elections Commission produce the following records “as soon as practicable and without delay”:¹

1. Records sufficient to identify the information described in parts a-h (below) regarding mail or absentee ballots submitted during the 2016 general election and the 2020 general election that were either 1) rejected, 2) successfully cured by a voter, 3) unsuccessfully cured by a voter (i.e., where a voter attempted to cure their ballot but failed to do so for any reason), 4) rejected after a voter declined (whether actively or passively) an opportunity to cure their ballot, or 5) rejected without first providing the voter an opportunity to cure their ballot. Please provide the requested information listed below separately for each type of ballot (i.e., rejected, successfully cured, etc.).
 - a. The total number of ballots.
 - b. The grounds for each rejection or challenge of each ballot.
 - c. The submission method (e.g., by mail, drop box, or hand-delivered) of each ballot.
 - d. The county and precinct in which each ballot was submitted.
 - e. The submission date of each ballot.
 - f. The date each voter that submitted a challenged or rejected ballot was notified of their ballot's deficiency.
 - g. The date each voter attempted to correct their rejected or challenged ballot.

¹ Wis. Stat. § 19.35(4)(a).



- h. The date a challenged or rejected ballot was cured by an election official

For part 1 of this request, to the extent that responsive information is aggregated and maintained in a database or spreadsheet, we request a printout from the database containing the information identified and described above (regardless of the actual title of the database fields). American Oversight does not object to the redaction of the names, addresses, or phone numbers of any voters listed in records responsive to these requests.

2. Any materials used to train election officials to a) determine whether submitted ballots should be accepted or rejected (including, but not limited to, records concerning signature matching/verification or verifying a voter's identity), b) determine whether rejected or challenged ballots have been successfully cured, and c) record the status of received ballots (e.g., logging the grounds for rejecting ballots).
3. Records sufficient to identify the title, training, and experience of each person tasked with determining a) whether submitted ballots should be accepted or rejected, or b) whether rejected or challenged ballots have been successfully cured.

For parts 2 and 3 of this request, please provide all responsive records from January 1, 2020, through the date this request is received by your office.

Fee Waiver Request

In accordance with Wis. Stat. § 19.35(3)(e), American Oversight respectfully requests that the records be produced without charge. Providing American Oversight with a waiver of fees is in the “public interest” because American Oversight will, in accordance with its organizational mission, make the records available to the public without charge. These disclosures will likely contribute to a better understanding of relevant government procedures by the general public.

American Oversight's work is aimed solely at serving the public interest. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, American Oversight does not have a commercial purpose and the release of the information requested is not in American Oversight's financial interest. Rather, American Oversight's mission is to serve the public by promoting transparency in government, educating the public about government activities, and ensuring the accountability of government officials. American Oversight uses the information gathered, and its analysis of it, to educate the public through reports, press releases, or other media.² American Oversight also makes materials it gathers available on its public

² See generally *News*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/blog>; *State Investigations*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/states>; see, e.g., *State Government Contacts with Voting-Restriction Activists*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/state-government-contacts-with-voting-restriction-activists>; *Wisconsin Documents Offer Window into Early Uncertainty over*

website³ and promotes their availability on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.⁴

The public has a significant interest in Wisconsin's election procedures.⁵ Records with the potential to shed light on this matter would contribute significantly to public understanding of operations of the government, including whether certain ballot issues lead to higher rates of rejection than others. American Oversight is committed to transparency and makes the responses agencies provide to public records requests publicly available, and the public's understanding of the government's activities would be enhanced through American Oversight's analysis and publication of these records.

American Oversight asks that if its request for a fee waiver is denied in whole or in part, that you contact us prior to incurring any costs.

Guidance Regarding the Search & Processing of Requested Records

American Oversight seeks all responsive records regardless of format, medium, or physical characteristics. In conducting your search, please understand the term "record" in its broadest sense, to include any written, typed, recorded, graphic, printed, or audio material of any kind. We seek records of any kind, including electronic records, audiotapes, videotapes, and photographs, as well as letters, emails, facsimiles, telephone messages, voice mail messages and transcripts, notes, or minutes of any meetings, telephone conversations or discussions. Our request includes any attachments to these records. **No category of material should be omitted from search, collection, and production.**

Please search all locations and systems likely to have responsive records regarding official business. **You may not exclude searches of files or emails in the personal custody of your officials, such as personal email accounts.** Emails conducting government business sent or received on the personal account of the authority's officer or employee constitutes a record for purposes of Wisconsin's public records laws.⁶

COVID-19, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/wisconsin-documents-offer-window-into-early-uncertainty-over-covid-19>.

³ *Documents*, American Oversight, <https://www.americanoversight.org/documents>.

⁴ American Oversight currently has approximately 16,200 page followers on Facebook and 109,200 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Nov. 30, 2021); American Oversight (@weareoversight), Twitter, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Nov. 30, 2021).

⁵ Anya Van Wagtendonk, *Bids to Alter Wisconsin Elections Fall Mostly Along Partisan Lines*, Wis. Watch, March 9, 2021, <https://wisconsinwatch.org/2021/03/bids-to-alter-wisconsin-elections-fall-mostly-along-partisan-lines/>.

⁶ Wisc. Dep't of J., *Wisconsin Public Records Law Compliance Guide*, Oct. 2019, at 3, <https://www.doj.state.wi.us/sites/default/files/office-open-government/Resources/PRL-GUIDE.pdf>.

In the event some portions of the requested records are properly exempt from disclosure, please disclose any reasonably segregable non-exempt portions of the requested records.⁷ If it is your position that a document contains non-exempt segments, but that those non-exempt segments are so dispersed throughout the document as to make segregation impossible, please state what portion of the document is non-exempt, and how the material is dispersed throughout the document. If a request is denied in whole, please state specifically that it is not reasonable to segregate portions of the record for release.

Please take appropriate steps to ensure that records responsive to this request are not deleted by the agency before the completion of processing for this request. If records potentially responsive to this request are likely to be located on systems where they are subject to potential deletion, including on a scheduled basis, please take steps to prevent that deletion, including, as appropriate, by instituting a litigation hold on those records.

Conclusion

If you have any questions regarding how to construe this request for records or believe that further discussions regarding search and processing would facilitate a more efficient production of records of interest to American Oversight, please do not hesitate to contact American Oversight to discuss this request. American Oversight welcomes an opportunity to discuss its request with you before you undertake your search or incur search or duplication costs. By working together at the outset, American Oversight and your agency can decrease the likelihood of costly and time-consuming litigation in the future.

Where possible, please provide responsive material in an electronic format by email. Alternatively, please provide responsive material in native format or in PDF format on a USB drive. Please send any responsive material being sent by mail to American Oversight, 1030 15th Street NW, Suite B255, Washington, DC 20005. If it will accelerate release of responsive records to American Oversight, please also provide responsive material on a rolling basis.

We share a common mission to promote transparency in government. American Oversight looks forward to working with your agency on this request. If you do not understand any part of this request, please contact Sarah Colombo at records@americanoversight.org or (202) 869-5244. Also, if American Oversight's

⁷ Wis. Stat. § 19.36(6).

request for a fee waiver is not granted in full, please contact us immediately upon making such a determination.

Sincerely,

/s/ Sarah Colombo
Sarah Colombo
on behalf of
American Oversight