

Mayors Representing 1.3 Million Constituents in Wisconsin call on Secretary Andrea Palm to act Quickly and Decisively to Prevent Further Spread of COVID-19

As leaders of communities throughout Wisconsin, we write to ask you to exercise the emergency powers delegated to you under section 252.02 of the Wisconsin State Statutes. We implore you to implement all emergency measures necessary to control the spread of COVID-19, a communicable disease. Specifically, we need you to step up and stop the State of Wisconsin from putting hundreds of thousands of citizens at risk by requiring them to vote at the polls while this ugly pandemic spreads.

This request is urgent because, as you know, Wisconsin's April primary election is scheduled for this Tuesday, April 7. We believe it would be irresponsible and contrary to public health to conduct in-person voting throughout the state at the very time this disease is spreading rapidly. Over 1,350,000 people live in our communities and we need you to provide leadership.

We thank Governor Evers for the leadership he demonstrated when he declared a state of emergency via Emergency Order #12. We thank him for calling a special session to address this issue. In light of the Legislature's inexcusable refusal to act, you and your department now are the sole parties in the position to prevent hundreds of thousands of voters and poll workers from potentially being exposed needlessly to this worldwide pandemic.

In his decision just days ago, Judge Conley recognized the important role you play when he said, "As much as the court would prefer the Legislature and Governor consider the public health ahead of any political considerations, that does not appear in the cards. **NOR IS IT APPROPRIATE FOR A FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT TO ACT AS STATE'S CHIEF HEALTH OFFICIAL BY TAKING THAT STEP FOR THEM.**" (p.36) (emphasis added)

We want to emphasize that the election has already begun. Hundreds of thousands of people have requested absentee ballots and many of those have already been returned. Those votes must be counted. The real issue now is how we conclude. We must still ensure every eligible voter has the right to vote without jeopardizing their health.

We recognize that you and your department have the authority to take this action, but that you do not have the authority to determine the modifications necessary to conclude this election. That power lies in the Legislative branch and with the Governor.

For that reason, we call on the Legislature to heed Governor Evers' request for a special session. Meet tomorrow before April 7, and work with him to craft a procedure that protects public health and protects the right to vote. We believe the most logical way to accomplish an election that maintains the safer-at-home order is to mail every registered voter a ballot.

EVERY other state that faced this issue during the pandemic has crafted a solution that respects democracy and protected the health of their citizens. We must do the same.

The lives of our constituents depend on it.

Signed,

Mayor Tom Barrett, Milwaukee
Mayor Eric Genrich, Green Bay
Mayor Lori Palmeri, Oshkosh
Mayor Tim Kabat, La Crosse
Mayor John Antaramian, Kenosha

Mayor Cory Mason, Racine
Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway, Madison
Mayor Karen Mischel, Viroqua
Mayor Kathy Ehley, Wauwatosa