



# Wisconsin Elections Commission

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**DATE:** For the March 31, 2020 Commission Meeting  
**TO:** Members, Wisconsin Elections Commission  
**FROM:** Meagan Wolfe, Administrator  
Wisconsin Elections Commission  
**SUBJECT:** Polling Place Supply and Personnel Shortages

During the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, local election officials across the state report concerns with the availability of polling place supplies and personnel to staff polling places. This memorandum provides a report summarizing local conditions as reported by Wisconsin municipal and county clerks.

## 1. Election Inspectors (a/k/a Poll Workers).

A. Reported Concerns. The most critical need in many polling places remains qualified election inspectors. Nearly 60% of Wisconsin municipalities report a shortage of poll workers. It should also be noted that many jurisdictions have dramatically consolidated polling places; this survey was based on need to staff the usual number of polling places. As of 6:30 p.m. on March 30, 2020, we have the following data:

| Reporting Status   | Poll Worker Shortage | Number of Jurisdictions |
|--|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Critical – jurisdiction cannot staff even one polling place                    | 671                  | 111                     |
| Serious – jurisdiction is unable to staff all desired polling places           | 2,713                | 126                     |
| Concerning – jurisdiction has fewer staff than needed for efficient operations | 3,469                | 542                     |
| Stable – jurisdiction has enough poll workers to function efficiently          | 86                   | 541                     |
| Did not report a status  | n/a                  | 530                     |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>6,939</b>         | <b>1,850</b>            |

Jurisdictions described as “Critical” and “Serious” are spread across the state with no geographic trends. Nearly every county in Wisconsin has at least one municipality concerned about their ability to open a polling place on April 7<sup>th</sup>. A map of these jurisdictions is attached with this memorandum. In addition, staff currently lack data from 530 municipalities who have not responded to the survey or other communications.

Finally, an additional concern for clerks is the possibility of unexpected absences due to illness or fear on election day. While an unexpected absence is always possible, many clerks worry they do not have adequate depth to accommodate missing staff. To mitigate this risk, many jurisdictions, including several large cities, are consolidating their polling places to preserve manpower.

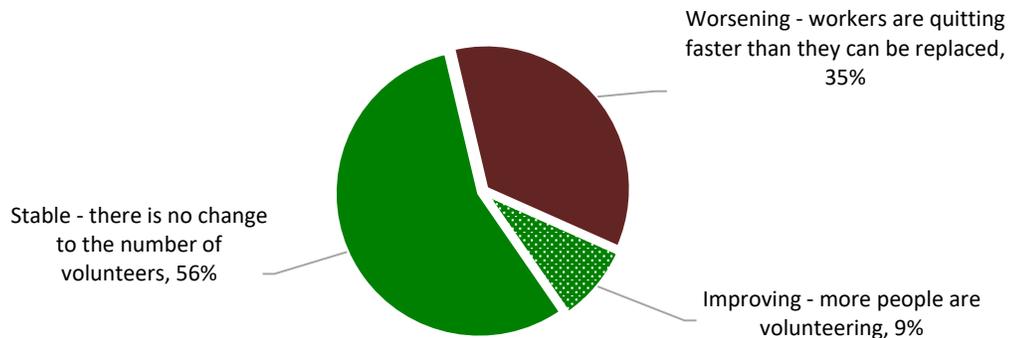
*Wisconsin Elections Commissioners*

Dean Knudson, chair | Marge Bostelmann | Julie M. Glancey | Ann S. Jacobs | Robert Spindell | Mark L. Thomsen

*Administrator*  
Meagan Wolfe

B. Efforts to Mitigate. To address this problem, clerks, WEC Staff, and the DOA have conducted outreach to colleges and universities, labor unions, state employees, and other groups. Clerks and staff have also issued press releases calling for volunteers and attempting to bring this issue to light in the media. While these efforts have yielded volunteers in some areas, clerks generally report the problem as growing.

Poll Worker Trends as Reported by Wisconsin Clerks



Looking ahead, staff are also considering options to mitigate the risk of missing poll workers on election day. Staff continue to explore alternate sources of personnel in collaboration with other state agencies. WEC staff is also continuing to work with state and county partners to identify a pool of reserve poll workers who can be trained ahead of time to serve in the event of an unplanned, critical lack of poll workers on election day. Draft guidance for clerks will be available later this week.

## 2. Special Supplies.

A. Envelopes. The COVID-19 crisis generated unprecedented demand for ballots by-mail and left many jurisdictions with a dwindling supply of absentee ballot envelopes. In early March, requests for envelopes rapidly grew from 300,000 to more than one million. The agency’s initial emergency procurement obtained and distributed 1.2 million absentee envelopes to nearly every county in the state. Demand for absentee ballot envelopes remains unprecedented and 1,050,000 additional envelopes were recently ordered. It’s expected that the envelopes most needed by jurisdictions will arrived by 4/1 but the balance of the additional envelopes are unlikely to arrive before the April 7<sup>th</sup> election. If municipalities run out of certificate envelopes, they have been provided with instructions on how to continue fulfilling requests using plain envelopes and printed certificates.

B. Sanitizer. Clerks in all counties have requested assistance obtaining sanitizer for both people and surfaces. As regular suppliers had no sanitizer available for purchase in time for the election, the WEC and DOA turned to local distilleries to obtain alcohol-based sanitizer products. This week the state will distribute 5,830 liters of multi-purpose sanitizer to clerks via six distribution centers established around the state. The shipment also includes 10,000 plastic spray bottles, adhesive labels for the bottles, and approximately 7,000 paper towel rolls. This quantity will be enough to supply all polling places with at least two liters of sanitizer.

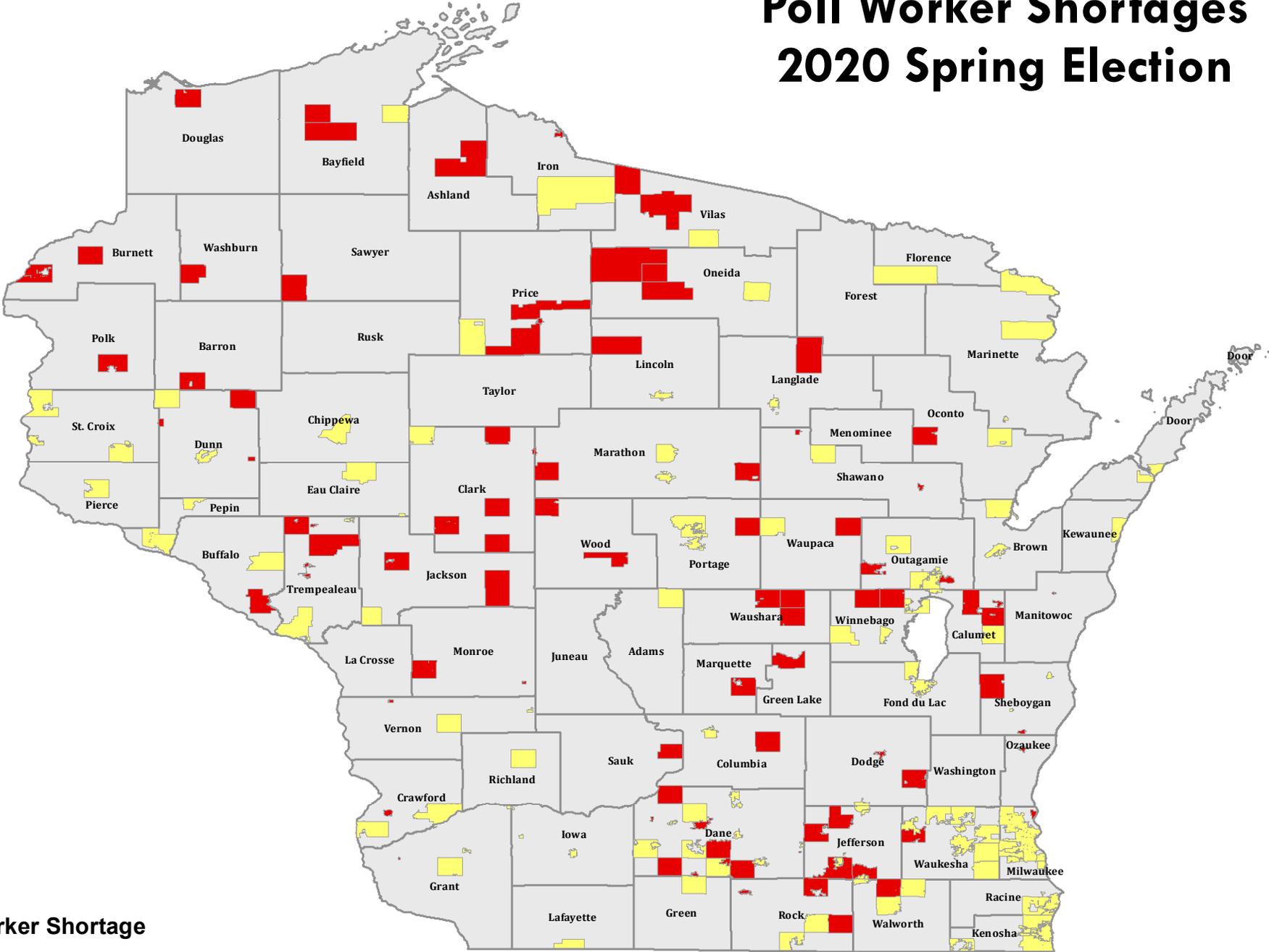
C. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Along with sanitizer, PPE remains an item in high demand across the state. Clerks have inquired about receiving Nitrile gloves and facemasks. This equipment is, however, limited to medical facilities and none has been made available to clerks through the state. Moreover, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has advised that this equipment may actually increase risk for untrained personnel and that hand washing should remain the focus of preventative efforts. Some clerks have procured their own equipment and expressed their intent to use it on election day.

D. Signage. WEC staff has placed an emergency print order of over 10,000 signs, checklists, and poll worker screeners approved by the Commission to distribute to each polling places. These signs will be distributed to all polling places through county clerks. Each polling place will receive one checklist, 2 screeners, 2 entrance signs, 4 social distancing signs, 2 poll book/photo ID signs, and 2 registration table signs.

E. Isopropyl Wipes. Staff submitted a request for 1.5 million disinfecting isopropyl wipes for polling places. To date, the state has procured 750,000 wipes. We expect to deliver these wipes this week and DOA procurement office continues to search for additional product.

F. Pens. Some clerks have asked for disposable pens that can be used at polling places, so voters and staff do not have to share pens. Staff submitted a request for 1.5 million pens and a supplier was located on March 30, 2020. The DOA procurement office believes these pens can be shipped to clerks this week. The pens can be used in all polling places to sign the poll book. In some jurisdictions they can also use the same pen to mark their ballot. There are some jurisdictions who will need to use their own ballot marking devices because pens may cause issues with the voting equipment.

# Poll Worker Shortages 2020 Spring Election



**Municipal Worker Shortage**

- Critical - No workers available 111
- Serious - Some polling places unstaffed 126