



## LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF WISCONSIN

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TO: The Assembly Committee on Judiciary and Ethics  
RE: Statement of the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin on Assembly Bill 1

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin strongly supports the goal of Assembly Bill 1 to create a single state agency responsible for ethics and elections and with the authority and capacity to enforce the law in these areas, including campaign finance.

The League's advocacy at the state and national levels is always grounded in our underlying commitment to promote an open governmental system which is representative, accountable and responsive. We believe government should function efficiently and economically. This requires clear assignment of responsibility, adequate financing and coordination among the different agencies of government. Beyond this, our campaign finance positions support the creation and maintenance of a strong governmental body to monitor and enforce campaign finance laws.

The proposed Assembly Bill 1, which places the responsibility for ethics and elections, including campaign finance laws, under one independent Wisconsin Government Accountability Board, has the potential to accomplish the above goals.

The League has supported previous proposals to merge the Wisconsin Ethics and Election Boards and we now commend the following strengths in the current Assembly Bill 1:

- The members of both the Candidate (nominating) Committee and the Government Accountability Board itself are to be completely nonpartisan, by limiting participation to appellate court and retired justices. The League would support involving representatives of nonpartisan groups. The Government Accountability Board should represent a broad and independent perspective.
- A unanimous vote of the Candidate Committee is to be required to nominate a candidate. This will reduce partisanship.
- The Government Accountability Board is to have at least six members. This brings various perspectives to the table and results in a significant quorum.
- Enforcement is rightly the core element of this proposal. Without adequate staffing and funding for enforcement along with investigating authority, the reforms of Assembly Bill 1 cannot achieve the highest degree of integrity in our state government.

The League also has concerns on some of the provisions of Assembly Bill 1, namely:

- The League would have preferred board members to have staggered, six-year terms. Long terms encourage institutional memory and also buffer the Board from partisan trends. In addition, we would have preferred Board decisions to require a supermajority vote.
- The League recommends the Government Accountability Board be authorized to give advisory opinions in confidence to officials and citizens who request them. The opinions, if binding, should be public but anonymous, satisfying the need for open records and fairness while protecting the privacy of individuals.

We hope that this committee will promptly bring to the floor a strong bill containing the above elements. It will go a long way toward restoring accountability to our state government and our democracy. Thank you very much.