



State of Wisconsin
Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

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POST OFFICE BOX 2659
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Telephone: 608-266-9354
Website: dhs.wisconsin.gov/gcpd

Thursday, June 24, 2021

The Honorable Tony Evers
115 E. Capitol Dr. # 1
Madison, WI 53702

RE: Voting Accessibility

Dear Governor Evers,

The Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities (GCPD) is deeply concerned with actions taken by Wisconsin lawmakers relative to voting. GCPD finds the bills to be an undue burden on thousands of Wisconsin citizens with disabilities and needlessly restrictive. GCPD is opposed to any legislation that restricts the opportunity to vote, and therefore urges you to exercise your veto authority and maintain the essential voice of people with disabilities in public policy.

GCPD's concerns relative to the negative impact of these bills are as follows:

SB 204 / AB 201: Absentee Ballot Applications – *Eliminates the option for indefinitely confined voters to receive absentee ballots automatically for every election and would require all indefinitely confined voters to provide a photo ID with their absentee ballot request.*

Accessible, affordable transportation is often the most significant barrier to people with disabilities and other non-drivers. Frequently, arranging even one extra trip is an impossible task. The process of obtaining a voter ID is already complex. An additional visit to a healthcare professional for certification of disability, as well as needing a Wisconsin ID, creates an undue and unnecessary burden on voters with disabilities.

SB 205 / AB 179: Absentee Voting in Residential Care Facilities – *Any action by staff that influences an eligible resident voter to request an absentee ballot or refrain from doing so would be a Class I felony. Would require the facility to notify residents' relatives as to when the special voting deputies will be coming to the facility to assist in the casting of absentee ballots.*



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Proposed legislation that threatens to penalize people who assist those with disabilities to complete and submit their absentee ballots means that fewer elders and people with disabilities may get to vote. This restriction disproportionately impacts individuals living in group homes, assisted living, or skilled nursing facilities. Individuals who normally provide voting assistance may think twice if they believe there is a chance they may incur a penalty. Reducing the number and location of drop boxes, and who is authorized to carry a ballot adds a further challenge to the constitutional right to vote. Greater demands or restrictions on the activities of those who assist individuals living in skilled nursing facilities or group homes to complete a ballot will result in fewer ballots being cast.

SB 206 / AB 180: Returning Absentee Indefinitely Confined Voter – *Legislation that requires a health care professional's verification to certify a person's disability and/or eligibility for absentee ballots creates critical barriers.*

Voters would be required to provide statements under oath and renew their status every two years. A false statement would be a felony. Individuals require transportation to travel to a physician's office. Many are among the population of elders and people with disabilities who are non-drivers, a circumstance which already creates a significant barrier to travel independently to polling places. Consequently, many rely on the absentee ballot. Any directive that restricts the use of absentee ballots will negatively affect the ability to vote. The process of applying for, completing, and submitting an absentee ballot is already rigorous and specific. Additionally, healthcare professionals are able only to certify an impairment or healthcare concern, which should have nothing to do with one's desire or ability to cast a ballot.

SB 209 / AB 177: Returning Absentee Ballots to the Office of the Clerk – *Will limit drop boxes for absentee ballots to a drop box that is attached to a building where the municipal clerk's office is permanently located. Prohibits the use of any other drop box for the delivery of an absentee ballot.*

Again, accessible and affordable transportation is among the most commonly identified barriers for people with disabilities and non-drivers in general.

Many Wisconsin citizens with disabilities who regularly vote require assistance with every step in this process from online application to submission of ballots. Restrictions described above will result in a further hardship. Any initiative to restrict the activities of city or county clerks



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may bring an additional hardship to voters with disabilities who may request assistance from election officials. There are thousands of Wisconsin citizens whose ability to vote would be significantly restricted if the above stated bills were to become law. GCPD is fully committed to advocacy supporting the empowerment of Wisconsin citizens with disabilities; consequently, GCPD remains committed to a process that ensures the integrity of the ballot and the right to vote.

GCPD remains available should you have further questions or wish further conversations. I would be happy to provide additional information and can be reached at (920) 248-9210 or via email David.Morstad@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "David Morstad".

David Morstad

Chair

Governor's Committee for People with Disabilities

CC: Lieutenant Governor Mandela Barnes, Fred Ludwig, Wisconsin State Legislature, and GCPD Members