

March 17, 2020

Re: Recommendations from disability and aging organizations re April 7<sup>th</sup> election

Dear Governor Evers and Legislative leaders,

We write with urgency to request that the full powers of the state be mobilized to support the voting rights of Wisconsinites with disabilities and older adults, in light of the significant challenges related to COVID-19.

The April 7<sup>th</sup> election poses significant difficulties for many voters with disabilities and older adults. A high percentage of these voters may need to vote absentee due to potential vulnerability to COVID-19 or lack of transportation. The volume of absentee ballot requests is unprecedented, and it will be challenging for municipal clerks to expedite the mailing and processing of absentee ballots.

In addition, voters who need to register to vote in order to request an absentee ballot may not be able to do so by the quickly approaching deadline of March 18<sup>th</sup>.

In light of these extraordinary challenges for many voters with disabilities and older adults, the undersigned agencies ask you to take action to protect the rights of Wisconsin voters by using emergency powers to address these concerns:

**1. Per 6.28(1)(a), the close for on-line and by-mail voter registration is Wednesday, March 18.**

**Concern:** After the passing of this deadline, any person that is quarantined or too ill to appear in person cannot request an absentee ballot unless they are already registered to vote at their current address. This will present an unjust hardship and prevent voting for Wisconsinites, and will disproportionately impact low income people, including many people with disabilities and older adults, who by the nature of poverty tend to be more transient.

**Request:** Extend the deadline for by-mail and online registration until the deadline for requesting an absentee ballot (the Thursday preceding the election) so that persons requesting absentee ballots can simultaneously register.

**2. Per 6.29(2)(a), the close of in person registration in the clerk's office and early voting locations is Friday, April 3.**

**Concern:** Many municipalities will offer extended in-person absentee voting or early voting hours through the weekend preceding the election in order to allow access to voting prior to Election Day for as many people as possible. This is an important measure to alleviate crowding at voting sites. However, no person requiring registration can register and vote on the weekend preceding the election.

**Request:** Extend the deadline for in-person registration to Sunday, April 5, the Sunday preceding the election

**3. Per 6.87(6), absentee ballots must be received by Election Day to be counted.**

**Concern:** Given the unprecedented volume of absentee voters and the unpredictability of when a person may *need to* apply for an absentee ballot, there is a strong probability that hundreds if not thousands of votes will be lost by late-arriving absentees (those received after Election Day). Additionally, there is no practical way that a person submitting a request for an absentee ballot on the deadline for submitting that request (the Thursday preceding the election) will have time to receive, vote and return their ballot by Election Day.

**Request:** Reinstate the counting of “late-arriving absentee ballots, which required municipalities to include in their final election results/canvass votes from any absentee ballots postmarked by Election Day and received by the Friday after the election. *This provision of law was eliminated by the legislature in August 2016.*

**4. Curbside Voting.** If a voter cannot enter the absentee voting location or polling place due to disability, Wis. Stat. § 6.82(1) requires that curbside voting must be available.

**Concern.** There is currently low awareness of curbside voting among members of the public and many polling places do not post signage regarding curbside voting. In addition, precautions related to COVID-19 support the benefit of providing greater flexibility in who can access curbside voting.

**Request:** We recommend that you direct the Wisconsin Election Commission and municipal clerks to promote curbside voting, to increase public awareness of this option, and to be more flexible regarding who can access curbside voting. This should include providing signage outside of polling place, as well as including information about curbside voting on websites and in other public communication.

We commend your efforts to promote absentee voting. Our organizations are working to share information about absentee voting and options for voter registration with voters with disabilities and older adults. Voting is one of the most fundamental rights of our democracy and we thank you for doing everything possible to ensure that Wisconsinites can continue to fully participate in the electoral process.

Thank you for considering these requests,

- Access to Independence
- Alas
- The Arc of Wisconsin
- Autism Society of Southeastern Wisconsin
- Center for Patient Partnerships
- Community Advocates
- Community Care
- Community Living Alliance
- Chrysalis
- Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance of Greater Milwaukee
- Disability Rights Wisconsin

- Family Voices of Wisconsin
- Grand Avenue Club, Inc.
- Greater Milwaukee Foundation
- Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources, Inc.
- Guest House of Milwaukee
- HEART Consulting, LLC
- Hearing Loss Association of America, Wisconsin State Chapter
- IndependenceFirst
- Independent Care Health Plan (iCare)
- Independent Living Resources , Inc
- Kids Forward
- League of Women Voters of Wisconsin
- Mental Health America of Wisconsin
- MidState Independent Living Choices
- Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force
- Milwaukee PEN PAPER POST
- My Choice Family Care
- NAMI Dane County
- NAMI Wisconsin
- North Country Independent Living
- Options for Independent Living
- OWL (Older Women's League)
- People First Wisconsin
- St. Clare Management, Inc
- Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations
- TMG
- Warmline, Inc.
- Wisconsin Aging Advocacy Network
- Wisconsin Association of the Deaf
- Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities
- Wisconsin Coalition of Independent Living Centers
- Wisconsin Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired
- Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition
- Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice

*Contact for follow up:*

*Barbara Beckert, Disability Rights Wisconsin & Disability Vote Coalition  
414-292-2724, [barbara.beckert@drwi.org](mailto:barbara.beckert@drwi.org)*