



For immediate release: June 8, 2021

Contact: Beth Swedeen, beth.swedeen@wisconsin.gov, 608-220-2924

Disability Advocates Concerned About Bad Voting Bills

This week the State Legislature will vote on several bills that will make it harder for many people with disabilities and older adults to vote. The Wisconsin Board for People with Disabilities urges the committee to reconsider the bills and work with disability advocates to write bills that make it easier for people with disabilities, older adults and people of color to vote – not harder.

“We have talked to dozens of people with disabilities and family members about their concerns with these bills. Most of them are afraid they won’t be able to vote if these bills are passed because of the numerous challenges they already face including lack of transportation and not having enough people to assist them,” said Beth Swedeen, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities, “These bills will dramatically increase those barriers making it even harder if not impossible.”

The punitive nature of many of these bills is also causing concern that caregivers or neighbors can’t or won’t be able to help them vote if these bills are passed. Andy Thain of Thorp, WI says, “That’s going to dramatically reduce my options and make it more difficult to vote.” Andy relies on a complicated system of caregivers who are everchanging to meet his daily living needs, including voting.

While amendments have slightly improved some of the bills, disability advocates still say the process should slow down, include real discussions about the unintended consequences of these bills and consider solid recommendations for bills that actually improving the election process for people with disabilities and older adults and address accessibility barriers.

The bills we are most concerned about include:

- SB 204 which would virtually eliminate the option for Indefinitely Confined voters to receive an absentee ballot for every election and would require all

indefinitely confined voters to provide a photo ID with their absentee ballot request or have a witness affirm their identity. This bill discriminates by age with harsher restrictions for voters with disabilities under age 65.

- SB 205 which would make it harder for voters who live in nursing homes and groups homes to vote and would restrict staff members from offering information about voter registration or information about applying for an absentee ballot.
- SB 206 which would require voters to provide statements under oath and renew their status every two years.
- SB 209 which limits drop boxes for absentee ballots to one that is attached to the building where the municipal clerk's office is located.

A significant number of Wisconsin voters have a disability. According to the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), approximately 23% of the electorate in the November election were individuals with some type of disability, including disabilities acquired through aging. As policymakers and election officials consider changes to Wisconsin law, it is important that they understand the rights of voters with disabilities, including the need to safeguard the protections in federal and state law.

About the Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities

BPDD is charged under the federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act with advocacy, capacity building, and systems change to improve self-determination, independence, productivity, and integration and inclusion in all facets of community life for people with developmental disabilities. For more information visit www.wi-bpdd.org.