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[www.disabilityvote.org](http://www.disabilityvote.org)

May 20, 2020

## **Statement to Wisconsin Election Commission in Support of Recommendations to Improve Absentee Voting**

The Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition is a non-partisan effort to help ensure full participation in the entire electoral process of voters with disabilities, including registering to vote, casting a vote, and accessing polling places. Our Coalition members thank the Wisconsin Election Commission for their report analyzing absentee voting the April 7th Spring Election, and their recommendations to improve access to the absentee voting process.

Our Coalition took an active role in educating voters with disabilities about absentee voting for the April 7<sup>th</sup> election and May 12<sup>th</sup> elections. We held multiple Zoom trainings, developed explanatory videos, developed and shared fact sheets, and provided phone and email support for voter questions. While many voters with disabilities were able to successfully vote absentee, our members heard from many voters with disabilities who wanted to vote absentee but experienced barriers to doing so. This included voters who wanted to vote absentee but were not able to do so because they did not receive a ballot in time, could not safely get their ballot witnessed, or were not able to upload their photo ID to request and receive a ballot. We also heard concerns from voters who rely on assistive technology to vote privately and independently; they did not have equitable access to absentee voting as Wisconsin does not have an ADA compliant accessible absentee ballot.

It is important that the Wisconsin Election Commission act on the lessons learned from the April 2020 election to ensure improved access to absentee voting for the August

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*The Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition is a project of  
Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities and Disability Rights Wisconsin*

and November elections, and to restore confidence in our absentee voting process. . We urge the Commission to provide needed public education and voter assistance on the absentee voting process, including for voters who do not have access to the internet and./or digital technology. The Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition supports the WEC staff's recommended motion to allocate CARES Act funding to improve the absentee voting process, including the following:

- Mailing absentee ballot request information to every registered voter without an active absentee ballot request on file, and other efforts to provide public education on the absentee voting process. Having the Wisconsin Elections Commission implement this process will provide a consistent statewide process, and will also be more cost effective than a fragmented local approach. A key success factor will be to have WEC staff oversee and follow up on applications as they are returned, if they are incomplete or lacking copies of photo ID.
- Adding Intelligent Bar Codes to allow for tracking of absentee ballots in the postal system, making it possible to track and resolve delivery issues, such as those experienced in the April election.
- In addition, we encourage policy makers to expand the provision in Wisconsin law that provides an electronic ballot to military and overseas voters, to also provide an accessible ADA compliant absentee ballot to voters with disabilities upon request.

The Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition is supportive of the WEC's *April 7 2020 Absentee Voting Report* and encourages Wisconsin Election Commissioners to support the recommendations from staff

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### **About the Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition**

*The WDVC is a non-partisan effort to help ensure full participation in the entire electoral process of voters with disabilities, including registering to vote, casting a vote, and accessing polling places.*