



Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition Policy Update (4/12/2021)

Public Hearings on April 14 and 15 for Bills That Could Make It Harder for People with Disabilities and Older Adults to Vote

Wisconsin legislators have introduced some voting bills that are scheduled for hearings this week. The bills could:

- Make it harder to vote for many voters, including voters with a disability and older adults.
- Make it more difficult for friends and neighbors to assist you with returning an absentee ballot.
- Restrict workers in nursing homes and group homes from offering residents assistance with voting.
- Put volunteers, clerks, and others at risk for prosecution for violating the new restrictions.

Hearing Information

- April 14 at 10 AM, [Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections](#) - Public Hearing
 - Includes AB 173 and AB 198
 - Rep. Brandtjen, Chair
 - [Link to hearing notice](#)
- April 15 at 10 AM [Senate Committee on Elections](#), Election Process Reform and Ethics - Public Hearing
 - Includes SB 204, SB 205, SB 214
 - Sen. Bernier, Chair
 - [Link to hearing notice](#)

Voter Advocacy Training April 13th

To learn more about the voting bills and how you can share your concerns, join us for Voter Advocacy Training on Zoom at April 13th at noon. Register [here](#).

How to share your concerns

If you are concerned about these bills, you can share your comments at a hearing or submit comments in writing. Here are some options:

- Attend the hearing at the Capitol and provide testimony.
- The Senate hearing will allow virtual testimony but you must submit your request in advance. Email Sen.Bernier@legis.wisconsin.gov or call (608) 266-7511.
- For the Assembly hearing, contact the chair's office to ask about options for testifying: Email Rep.Brandtjen@legis.wisconsin.gov or call (608) 267-2367
- Written testimony sent by email. Check with the committee clerk about this option.
- In your testimony, you will need to provide the bill numbers and whether you are speaking "in favor" or "against" a bill or for information only.

Sample testimony

[Your Name and a brief introduction about yourself (where you live, volunteer, work, etc.)]

I am concerned about the following bills (list the bill numbers) because they will make it harder for me (or people I care about) to vote.

[Tell your story: talk about how these bills will personally make it harder for you or someone you know to vote.]

As an American, few things are more important to me than my right to vote and ensuring all people, including people with disabilities, have that same opportunity. Please vote to support accessible and inclusive elections.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]

SUMMARY OF VOTING BILLS SCHEDULED FOR HEARINGS

April 14th Assembly Hearing at 10 AM

SB 207/AB 173 – private resources used for an election/appointment of poll workers

- Would restrict who can serve as a poll worker. This includes prohibiting employees of an issue advocacy group from serving as poll workers. This could include employees of groups who advocate for voting rights, or for people with disabilities or older adults. Wisconsin currently has a shortage of poll workers.
- Would prohibit municipalities from applying for or accepting donations or grant moneys for purposes of election administration.
 - Some municipalities have used donations and grant funding to address accessibility and curbside voting.
 - Grant funding was used to fund health and safety precautions during COVID.

SB 212/ AB 198 Defects on Absentee Ballot Certificates

- Prohibits a municipal clerk from correcting a defect on the completed absentee ballot certificate envelope.
Example: *a witness for your ballot forgets to complete their address. Currently the clerk may look up the address or contact the voter for information.*
- If a certificate envelope has a defect, the clerk must return the ballot to the elector and post a notification of the defect on the elector's voter information page on MyVote website.
- Concerns:
 - Would not reach voters who cannot access MyVote; they would be unaware of the problem, and would not be able to correct it.
 - The mail is slow. There may not be time to return the ballot to the voter and for the voter to send it back, so the vote may not be counted.

Senate Hearing April 15th at 10 AM

SB 204/ AB 201 Absentee Ballot Applications

- This bill makes it more difficult to absentee vote.
- Eliminates the option for indefinitely confined voters to receive absentee ballots automatically for every election.
- Would require all indefinitely confined voters to provide a photo ID with their absentee ballot request.
- Prohibits the WI Election Commission, clerks, and other groups from sending absentee ballot applications to all eligible voters; makes it a felony to mail absentee ballot applications to anyone who has not requested one.

*Note: If a voter has a hard time leaving their home to vote, due to age, illness, infirmity, or disability, and always wants to vote absentee, he/she may request an absentee ballot for every election and certify he/she is "**indefinitely confined because of age, illness, infirmity, or disability**". An indefinitely confined voter is not required to show a Photo ID when voting by absentee ballot. Instead the witness verifies the voter's name and address "in lieu of providing identification. [Wis Stats 6.87\(4\)\(b\)2](#)*

SB 205 / AB 179 Absentee Voting in residential care facilities

- Would limit voting rights of nursing home and group home residents.
- If staff offered to provide a resident with assistance, this would be a felony: "*No employee of a qualified retirement home ... may influence an occupant of the home or facility to apply for or not apply for an absentee ballot or cast or refrain from casting a ballot.*" May conflict with federal law which requires nursing homes to support and affirm the right of residents to vote.
- This bill would require the administrator of the facility to notify relatives of the residents as to when the special voting deputies will be coming to the facility to assist in the casting of absentee ballots.

SB 214: re early canvassing of absentee ballots, combined polling places.

- Allows municipal clerks to start canvassing the absentee ballots the day before the election, which could be helpful for clerks.
- Authorizes any city, village, or town with a population of less than 35,000 to enter into an agreement to share a polling place with an adjacent city, village, or town having a population of less than 35,000.
- Concern: Transportation is already a significant barrier for many voters, combining polling sites would increase this challenge.