

ACLU of Wisconsin: Broad coalition of advocacy groups call for voting system changes amid COVID-19 pandemic

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MADISON – A coalition of voting rights, civil rights, and other advocacy groups called for a series of changes to preserve voting rights and protect public health amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

In an open letter sent today to the Wisconsin Election Commission and other interested parties, the organizations called for, among other changes, all registered voters to receive a ballot in the mail automatically before each election as well as for every municipality to have a minimum number of polling locations within their community based on the size of the population.

“Wisconsin has multiple elections scheduled for 2020 and it is imperative that our elected representatives act now to put in place election processes that will ensure all voters can be safe while exercising their constitutionally guaranteed voting rights,” said the organizations in the letter.

“On election day, voters faced numerous hardships at polling locations. Many voters experienced long lines caused by a reduction in polling locations, and unsafe conditions at polling sites due to a lack of appropriate precautionary measures.

“Additionally, tens of thousands of voters who requested absentee ballots were forced to risk their health and safety – and the health and safety of everyone – to go vote or to follow the Governor’s ‘Safer at Home’ order because the ballots they requested never came.”

On Tuesday, April 7, Wisconsin was the first state to hold a statewide election during a global pandemic and under a stay-at-home order issued by its governor. Weeks before the election, a collective of voting rights organizations voiced their concern with holding an election during a pandemic. The consensus was that state lawmakers needed to implement several recommendations. However, decisionmakers refused to make accommodations or recognize the challenges and burdens being placed on individuals—particularly those such as people who have suffered from racial and economic injustices, as well as people with disabilities—because of COVID-19.

The organizations are asking the following:

- Mail a ballot to all registered voters; automatically before each election. Ideally 30 days before the election date. Voters should not be required to have a witness or provide proof of an ID to request or return their ballot.
- Allow voters to return ballots multiple ways: through the mail, the use of secure drop boxes, and by dropping it off at polling locations on the day of the election.
- Every municipality should have a minimum number of polling locations within their community based on the size of the population, located in areas that can serve all populations in the municipality and allow voters to register and vote quickly and efficiently if they choose to vote in person on election day.
- Every municipality should offer in-person access to early voting and voter registration in a way that proves to be safe and secure, as well as ballot drop boxes for several weeks before Election Day.
- Voter registration should be as easy as possible through automatic voter registration in schools or at the DMV. Voters should also be able to register in person on Election Day and during early voting periods.

- The Wisconsin Election Commission should fund public education efforts to ensure that all citizens are aware of how our voting process works and how they can participate.
- For citizens for whom English is a second language they should have access to language assistance for voting. This should include access to ballots and elections materials in multiple languages, in addition to English and Spanish.

The organizations signing on to today's statement are:

ACLU of Wisconsin

Black and Brown Womyn Power Coalition, Inc.

Black Lives Matter to Wisconsin Unitarian Universalists

Chippewa Valley Votes

EXPO (Ex Incarcerated People Organizing)

Freedom, Inc.

Hmong American Women's Association, Inc.

Layton Boulevard West Neighbors (LBWN)

League of Women Voters of Wisconsin

MICAH (Milwaukee Innercity Congregations Allied for Hope)

Midwest Environmental Advocates

Milwaukee County Human Rights Commission

MIRACLE Mental Health

Milwaukee Turners

National Lawyers Guild, Milwaukee Chapter

9to5, National Association of Working Women - WI

Parents for Public Schools - MKE

Progressive Baptist Church

Represent Us Wisconsin

Schools and Communities United

SOPHIA

Souls to the Polls

Voces de la Frontera

Wisconsin Voices

WAVE Educational Fund

WISDOM

Wisconsin Conservation Voices

Wisconsin Alliance for Excellent Schools (WAES)

Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health

Wisconsin Democracy Campaign

A copy of the open letter sent today is attached to this email, and this release is available online at:

<https://www.aclu-wi.org/en/news/broad-coalition-voting-rights-civil-rights-and--advocacy-groups-call-voting-system-changes-amid>
