

ACLU Wisconsin: New report finds widespread voting disenfranchisement in Wisconsin jails

Posted on Wednesday, Jul 1, 2020

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

MILWAUKEE – The ACLU of Wisconsin and All Voting is Local today released Ballots for All: Ensuring Eligible Wisconsin Voters in Jail Have Equal Access to the Ballot. The report revealed that eligible voters in Wisconsin jails are being disenfranchised because facilities lack policies and enforcement to ensure equal access to the ballot, violating the government’s legal responsibility to make voting accessible to all.

There are typically about 12,500 Wisconsinites in county jails on any given day – the vast majority of whom are eligible to vote. Jails are required by law to provide ballots and registration opportunities to all eligible voters. In Wisconsin, people serving misdemeanor jail sentences, or who are awaiting trial, are eligible to vote, and they are allowed to vote absentee by mail if they are unable to vote in person.

Of the 61 out of 72 counties who responded to open records requests, 52.5% do not have written policies specifying how people in their care can register to vote and cast their ballots, while 48% had only brief, vague policies. Only one jail, Kenosha County, had a detailed policy, including a facility-based inmate voting liaison.

“Our democracy works best when everyone participates,” the report states. “The fundamental right to vote is central to this, particularly during a global pandemic where government decisions have such an immediate impact on the lives of every Wisconsinite, it is critical that no eligible voter be denied this fundamental right. When eligible voters are denied this right, not only are their voices silenced,

but also the voices of their families and communities.”

The report makes concrete recommendations to protect and expand voting rights for people in jails, including easing barriers to voter registration, expanding opportunities to vote by mail and establishing election day polling places.

“There is time to make these changes before the November election,” the report states. “Looking ahead to future years, Wisconsin decisionmakers must look at ways to extend the right to vote via an agent, and expand options for proof of identity. Ultimately, no Wisconsinite should ever be disenfranchised. Only then will we move toward a democracy that truly works for us all.”

The ACLU of Wisconsin and All Voting is Local will host a virtual town hall to discuss the report Wednesday, July 1, at 6:30 p.m CT. Register in advance at

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_tr53OIFdRyerW7LRlgLX1A.