

League of Women Voters of Wisconsin: Statement on April 7 spring election issues

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WISCONSIN—Following Tuesday's Spring election, in which hundreds of thousands of voters experienced ballot shortages, long lines, confusion, and the choice between their health and their constitutional right to vote, the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin Executive Director **Debra Cronmiller** issued the following statement:

“As we wait for ballots to be processed and tallied from yesterday's election, we take stock of this spring election season and all that Wisconsin voters have been through these past weeks. It's no secret that this election has been plagued with serious—and even dangerous—issues.

“Voters experienced difficulty requesting and receiving absentee ballots, poll worker shortages resulted in long wait times to cast in-person votes despite guidance by WEC to minimize one's time in the polling place, irregular application of curbside voting practices, mixed messages to persons quarantining at home for their safety regarding how to vote, and many other discrepancies. State election officials' response to the global pandemic effectively disenfranchised hundreds of thousands of voters, most acutely people of color, people with disabilities, elderly people, students, and people who are transient.

“This is not how democracy is supposed to work. Our system depends on ensured, unabridged access to the ballot, but that is far from the treatment that Wisconsin voters experienced yesterday. In this unprecedented time of pandemic, the advice to voters to use the absentee ballot option was critically important to minimize the demand for in-person polling sites.

“Over two weeks ago, the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin called on the Wisconsin Election Commission to provide every registered voter with an absentee ballot, including the pre-paid return envelope. Throughout the weeks leading up to the election, we continually asked for clarity around the rules for things like the witness signature certification process and the ability to count the unprecedented number of absentee ballots. We asked that additional time be granted to hold the in-person election to ensure that the largest number of people possible could vote via mailed ballot during this public health emergency. Still, voters were not provided the tools they needed so they could cast their ballots safely and confidently. Too many were driven to show up in person at the polls, despite public health recommendations against gathering in large groups.

“It was either show up and risk your health or lose your right to vote. That is the burden that our state’s leaders put on us as constituents. This is unconscionable—a violation of voters’ constitutional rights and the simple humanity that binds us all.

“Wisconsin has more elections in the coming months. Our leaders cannot fail voters like this again. We must begin preparing now so that every voter can safely cast their ballot. We implore our leaders to do better.”