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Disability Vote Coalition, DRW: Resources and updates

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(MILWAUKEE) — Yesterday's ruling by a federal judge that the deadline for requesting an absentee ballot would be extended by one day, until 5 p.m. today, and would allow ballots to be counted if they arrived by April 13 is good news for voters with disabilities, who already face extensive barriers to participation in the electoral process. The judge's ruling also says voters can provide a statement with their absentee ballot that they could not safely obtain a witness's signature to avoid that requirement. Voters who are not facing that barrier should still have someone "witness" their return envelope before they mail their ballot back for counting.

To help voters with disabilities and their supporters understand the quickly-changing election rules in Wisconsin, The Disability Vote Coalition will offer three live events via Zoom on Monday 10 am and 6 pm and Tuesday at 8 am. Click www.disabilityvote.org for information to join any of those events.

"Many voters with disabilities lack transportation to get an acceptable photo ID and to get to the polls," said Barbara Beckert, of the Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition (WDVC) and Disability Rights Wisconsin. "They may face accessibility challenges at the polling site including parking spaces, accessible routes in the building or finding the accessible voting machine is not set up or not working. COVID-19 has just intensified all those barriers." Voters with questions are encouraged to contact the Disability Rights Wisconsin Voter Hotline at 844-DIS-VOTE or email info@disabilityvote.org.

"We have been very concerned about this election because of the unprecedented amount of people voting absentee. People with disabilities have found absentee voting to be one of the best ways for them to be involved in the electoral process but since the COVID-19 crisis hit, it's taking over a week to receive a ballot",

Beckert said. “In addition, many people with disabilities are isolated and have difficulties getting help with technology to request their ballot, upload their photo ID and provide a witness signature. With the decision to suspend the use of Special Voting Deputies, many voters in nursing homes and group homes are unable to cast a ballot in the April election.”

“While this does alleviate some issues voters with disabilities are experiencing in this particular election, we were hoping for additional provisions like waiving the requirement to upload a photo ID if it is the first time you are requesting an absentee ballot, or postponing the election to allow time to address the barriers so many voters are experiencing, ” said Jenny Neugart from the WDVC and the Board for People with Developmental Disabilities.

Resources for voters with disabilities are available on the Disability Vote Coalition website at disabilityvote.org/ and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/-wisconsindisabilityvote/. Voters may request assistance by calling the Disability Rights Wisconsin Voter Hotline at 844-DIS-VOTE or by emailing info@disabilityvote.org