

Wisconsin Conservation Voices: Hidden disenfranchisement: disabled voters left at the curb - Advocacy groups urge voters to know their rights

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WISCONSIN – Voters with disabilities have the same right to cast their ballot as any other voter, but many voters are not aware of their right to access curbside voting as established by Wisconsin law and the [Wisconsin Elections Commission](#). Curbside voting gives voters with disabilities an accessible and safe way to turn in their ballot by having a poll worker come outside to assist them.

In a scenario all too familiar across the state, voters with disabilities often don't know their right to curbside voting at their polling place. Overworked and under-resourced municipal clerks have not shared information about how to access curbside voting on official websites and other communication outlets, making it difficult for voters to know how to access this essential accommodation.

With just a day until Election Day, Nov. 3, this lack of communication is leaving these voters behind, when instead they should be supported by our governments. The most recent Wisconsin Supreme Court ruling is forcing more disabled voters to vote in person and drop off their absentee ballots rather than mail them in so they can be counted on time.

“During the pandemic, access to curbside voting is one of the most fundamental supports for safe voting,” said Barbara Beckert, the Milwaukee Office Director of Disability Rights Wisconsin. “By law, curbside voting is supposed to be available at

every polling place. It is supposed to be available to voters who have difficulty entering their polling place due to disability as well as any voter who is immunocompromised, or was exposed to or has symptoms of COVID-19.”

Disability advocates are currently contacting clerks across the state to urge them to uphold these requirements and get [accurate information and resources](#) to disabled voters. Two leading advocates, Disability Rights Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition, work directly with voters who are reporting barriers to casting a ballot this election season.

Wisconsin is seeing voter suppression tactics ramping up. With its already restrictive rules, especially for underrepresented communities, this lack of knowledge is making it challenging for citizens to exercise their right to vote.

“If voters don’t know curbside voting is available, they won’t benefit from this accommodation,” Beckert said. “They may choose not to vote, or put themselves or others at greater risk by waiting in line and/or voting inside in close quarters.”

Many people with disabilities are already at greater risk of COVID-19, and curbside voting is a way to safeguard the people who didn’t receive absentee ballots. But that safeguard can only be effective if voters can access the information. If they experience barriers or have a question, voters can call the Disability Rights Wisconsin Voter Hotline at 844-DIS-VOTE at any time for help. Additional information about rights and accommodations for voters with a disability is available on disabilityvote.org.

INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITIES:

Barbara Beckert: Milwaukee Office Director at Disability Rights Wisconsin
Randi Johnson, Steve Johnson, and Shirin Cabraal: Wisconsin voters with disabilities who have used curbside voting.