

AARP Wisconsin: Pleased that WEC affirms rights for voters who need help returning ballots

Posted on Thursday, Sep 8, 2022

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MADISON, WI – AARP Wisconsin today announced its support for the guidance that the Wisconsin Elections Commission released to local clerks regarding the return of absentee ballots under the Federal Voting Rights Act. This guidance, released yesterday, comes as a result of the Aug. 30 U.S. District Court for the Western District of Wisconsin's decision in the matter of Timothy Carey et al. v. Wisconsin Elections Commission.

"We are extremely pleased to see that common sense prevailed in the new guidance issued yesterday by the Wisconsin Elections Commission," said AARP Wisconsin State Director Martha Cranley. "Wisconsin voters who require assistance with mailing or delivering their absentee ballot to their municipal clerk because of a disability must be permitted to receive such assistance by someone that the voter chooses. Voters who need help returning their ballot for the November 8 general election won't encounter additional barriers to get the assistance they need."

Cranley said AARP Wisconsin is "pleased to learn that voters can self-identify as someone who needs this help so that older people with limited mobility, vision and hearing issues or other health concerns that would require assistance will be able to exercise their right to vote."

Under the order, voters won't need to certify or prove a disability and, likewise, assistors do not need to do any certification. Municipal election clerks will not need to confirm that a voter who is receiving assistance is disabled.

However, clerks are being given permission to ask questions of those assistors

returning absentee ballots for others, including whether the voter is disabled and if the person returning the ballot works for the voters' employer or a union. AARP commends the election commission for also clarifying that an assistor can return more than one ballot.

"We agree with the federal judge's ruling that voters are entitled to assistance in returning their absentee ballots despite a state law saying they must return them on their own or through the mail or in person," Cranley said. "The federal Voting Rights Act guarantees disabled voters access to assistance, and yesterday's guidance clarifies that assistance.

"Voters age 50-plus make up 55% of Wisconsin's registered voters and they are reliable voters in mid-term elections. Ensuring that these voters – regardless of their mobility or health status – can participate in the democratic process is a big win for Wisconsin," Cranley said.

AARP Wisconsin enthusiastically supports the removal of any roadblocks that stand in the way of any Wisconsin voter's right to vote legally and safely.