

Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities: Senate passes sweeping voting package that will make it harder for people with disabilities to vote

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Yesterday the Senate passed a package of bills that change election laws. While SB 937 makes positive clarifications to the definition of Indefinitely Confined Voters, most provisions in these bills make it harder for people with disabilities to vote and will disproportionately disenfranchise this part of the electorate. [Read BPDD's testimony.](#)

Voters with disabilities face many barriers when trying to vote.

- Many people with disabilities rely on absentee ballots to vote, and on friends, neighbors, extended family, care workers and the community for help getting to the polls and making sure absentee ballots are returned.
- Often people with disabilities have limited or no access to the internet because of lack of broadband infrastructure or living in congregate living arrangements that do not have internet connections.
- Our population often live near or below the federal poverty level and may not be able to afford internet or smartphone subscriptions.
- Many people with disabilities and others are non-drivers and have few transportation options.
- Polling places may not be accessible.

“Folks have the right to vote and to equal access to voting whether absentee or at

the polls,” said Beth Swedeen, Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities Executive Director. “And folks means everyone, including those who have a harder time than most getting to the polls or completing and returning absentee ballots.”

SB 999 would require absentee voters to repeatedly provide the same information already on file to get an absentee ballot and restrict who can assist them with returning a completed and secured absentee ballot.

“Wisconsin people are known for helping people who need it through small everyday actions, including helping neighbors get their absentee ballots into their mailboxes or clerk’s offices,” said Swedeen. “This bill makes helpers into potential criminals and puts additional burden on voters to find helpers who meet the narrow criteria in the bill.”

SB 934 would mean people would lose their voter registration if they move within the same community and require them to reregister.

“Even if you move two doors down and have the same polling place and clerk, this bill requires registered voters to re-register. Many voters will be confused and think they are registered only to discover they are not the next time they try to vote,” said Swedeen. “Many people with disabilities live in insecure housing and move frequently, not always by choice if they are in congregate settings. Unstable housing is now one more way existing voters may lose their registration.”

SB 937 includes positive language clarifying who may use this status.

“Wisconsin’s indefinitely confined statute provides an important safeguard to ensure that many voters who are disabled or have chronic health conditions can cast a ballot,” said Swedeen.

SB 935 adds the number of required fields that must be completed on an absentee ballot and removes the ability for clerks to correct minor mistakes. Only the voter or witness can correct their mistake.

“Any mistake by voter or witness could result in ballots being uncounted, said Swedeen. “Minor administrative mistakes will result in major hurdles for people with disabilities to correct, assuming they know their ballot needs to be corrected to count.”

SB 941 creates a legislative role on whether to accept federal election guidance, some of which specifically addresses the rights of voters with disabilities to have equitable access to the ballot.

“Arbitrary delays in implementing federal guidance that facilitates equal access to the ballot for voters with disabilities risks disenfranchising this population of voters,” said Swedeen.

[BPDD is charged under the federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act](#) with advocacy, capacity building, and systems change to improve self-determination, independence, productivity, and integration and inclusion in all facets of community life for people with developmental disabilities.