

Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition: Thank you, Wisconsin Elections Commission

Posted on Friday, Jun 30, 2023

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Today the Wisconsin Election Commission (WEC) released their 2023 report on Barriers Faced by Elderly Voters and Voters with Disabilities. The report provides information regarding the accessibility of Wisconsin polling places; Wis. Stat. 5.25(4)(d) requires that the report be released every two years.

The Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition commends Commissioners, and Administrator Meagan Wolfe and her staff for the progress made to improve accessibility of Wisconsin polling places. Under federal law, all polling places for federal elections must be fully accessible to older adults and voters with disabilities. "WEC's Accessibility Program has made significant progress during the reporting period," stated Barbara Beckert, Disability Rights Wisconsin. "The Disability Vote Coalition thanks staff and Commissioners for their dedicated work and partnership to improve accessibility."

In the 2022-2023 election cycle, 551 polling place reviews were conducted. The review program visited 379 municipalities in 47 counties. Each polling place receives a list of any issues found and submits a plan of action to resolve each issue. Many common accessibility problems can be addressed by the Supply Program which provides clerks with free accessibility supplies including traffic cones, wireless doorbells, and signs for accessible entrances, parking, and curbside voting.

"Accessibility is important to a growing number of voters," stated Jenny Neugart, Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities. "According to the Center for Disease Control, approximately 26% of American adults (1 in 4) have

some type of disabling conditions. They may experience disability related barriers to registering to vote and casting a ballot.” The disability vote includes people who are blind and low vision, deaf and hard of hearing, with intellectual and developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, mental health disabilities, complex medical needs, and chronic health conditions. Many older adults have disabilities acquired through aging, although they may not formally identify as a person with a disability.

Recommendations. The Disability Vote Coalition urges policymakers to support accessibility by increasing funding to support the WEC Polling Place Accessibility Review Program and Supply Program. Additional funding is needed to fill the gap created by reduced federal funding and to expand staff support to oversee the Polling Place Review program and other accessibility efforts.

While federal and state law include many provisions that address the accessibility of our elections, some voters with disabilities continue to experience barriers in addition to polling place accessibility. These many include limited access to transportation; lack of acceptable photo ID as many are non-drivers, poll workers who are not trained on disability rights and may deny accommodations, and failure to enforce the federal and state laws that protect disability voting rights and accessibility.

We welcome the opportunity to work with Wisconsin policymakers to make voting more accessible and inclusive and have provided the following recommendation:

□ [View the WDVC's Policy Recommendations here \(accessible PDF\)](#).