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Contact: Lisa Pugh, The Arc Wisconsin; 608-422-4250

The Arc Wisconsin Concerned about New Barriers for Voters with Disabilities

(Madison) - The Arc Wisconsin joins with other disability advocacy organizations in sharing strong opposition to various restrictive voting bills on the Assembly's agenda today.

The right to vote is fundamental. People with disabilities, including people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) have the right to participate in our democracy, though this right has often been denied. According to the 2020 Disability and Voting Accessibility Survey, about one in nine voters with disabilities encountered difficulties voting in 2020. This is double the rate of people without disabilities. Nationally, people with disabilities voted at a 7% lower rate than people without disabilities of the same age, pointing toward a continuing disability gap in voter turnout.

Because people with I/DD often live in provider-controlled settings like adult family homes or other facilities to access the care they need, they face even greater hurdles to voting. The bills being voted on today create new barriers and make it harder for indefinitely confined voters and for nursing home and group home residents to vote.

Specifically, these bills:

- Eliminate the option for people with disabilities to be a permanent absentee voter and always receive an absentee ballot. (indefinitely confined voter)
- Require any voter who wants to vote absentee to apply for an absentee ballot for every election instead of requesting an absentee ballot for the year.
- Make it a crime for staff of nursing homes or group homes to offer residents information about absentee voting.

Ensuring voting independence, accuracy, and access are key issues for The Arc Wisconsin. Voters with disabilities already deal with barriers in getting to the polls or to access a photo ID including coordinating transportation, access to broadband or computers and accessible materials. These bills set voters with disabilities back even further. We should be looking for ways to both ensure election security and increase voting access, particularly for people who we know already face barriers.

The Arc advocates for and serves people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), including Down syndrome, autism, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, cerebral palsy and other diagnoses. The Arc has a network of over 600 chapters across the country and 14 in Wisconsin promoting and protecting the human rights of people with I/DD and actively supporting their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes and without regard to diagnosis. Editor's Note: The Arc is not an acronym; always refer to us as The Arc, not The ARC and never ARC. The Arc should be considered as a title or a phrase.