



Wisconsin Voter Experiences Shared by Voters with Disabilities and Older Adults (compiled April 2021)

The Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition has developed this document to share the voting experience of some Wisconsin voters with disabilities in 2020 – 2021, including some of the barriers they have experienced.

Our source include LWV Election Protection Report 2020, the 2020 survey commissioned by the National Disability Rights Network, Self Advocates Being Empowered (SABE) 2018 Survey, Disability Vote Coalition 2018 Survey, and the Disability Vote Coalition April 2020 Survey, as well as voters contacts to the DRW Voter Hotline and to other coalition members, and interviews conducted by the Coalition. This sample of elections feedback provides highlights of the challenges that voters with disabilities experienced.

About the Disability Vote

A significant number of voters have a disability. According to the American Association of People with Disabilities, approximately 23% of the electorate in the November 2020 election were individuals with some type of disability. This is a diverse group of voters. It 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. People with disabilities intersect all walks of life, all professions, across all races, religions, ethnicities, gender identities, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic classes.

In 2020, more than 2 in 5 voters report having a disability and/or having a family member or a close friend with a disability.² Voters with disabilities nationwide split their 2020 general election votes evenly between the Democratic and Republican candidate. Among voters with disabilities in battleground states, 52% voted for the Republican candidate. Half of all voters with disabilities/family/friends voted for the Democrat.²

Less than one-third of 2020 voters remember hearing, reading, or seeing anything from congressional or presidential campaigns about issues that are important to people with disabilities.²

The document includes examples of feedback from voters with disabilities regarding voting obstacles in the areas of: registration, absentee voting, lack of accessible absentee ballot, accessible voting machines, polling place physical accessibility, curbside voting, photo ID, transportation, voting for residents of care facilities, and COVID elated lack of access.

Registration

- A caregiver brought a voter living in a group home to the polls, but the voter did not have proof of residence. *Observed in Green Bay*¹
- A voter had recently moved and was staying with his mother; he had proof of residence at his old address, but not his mother's address. He was unable to register or vote. *Observed in Milwaukee*¹
- A voter produced a promotional mailing, which was not accepted as proof of residence. The poll worker did not ask about electronic documents. An observer spoke to the voter outside the polling place and discovered she had an electronic utility bill, which she was able to use. *Observed in Milwaukee*¹
- A voter did not have proof of residence when he went to vote, and apparently was not able to get proof of residence at home and return to the polling place to register and vote. *Observed in West Allis*¹
- An older voter with mobility issues had transportation to her polling place for the April election. She was not able to register because the documentation she brought to prove residency was not acceptable. She contacted the hotline for assistance with transportation to return to her polling place for a second time to bring additional documentation. ⁶ Milwaukee

Absentee Voting

17% of voters with disabilities indicated that they either don't know how to request and absentee ballot or tried but gave up because it was too difficult. As a result, these voters did not vote in the April 2020 election.⁵

54% of voters with disabilities indicated that they voted absentee in the April 2020 election.⁵

Requesting Absentee Ballot

- “When I attempted to request for an absentee ballot online the process was incomplete. I knew I could vote next door at my usual place where some election volunteers are familiar with me. When I realized my voting place had been moved to a new site due to only 5 available polling sites, it was too late to get help to obtain an absentee ballot.”⁵
- “I requested by mail and my request got lost. Thankfully, I had enough time to request via the website.”⁵
- “The site kept malfunctioning. Had to do it several times before it went totally through.”⁵
- Several voters called the hotline in April. They thought that they signed up last year to always receive absentee ballots and expected to receive a ballot for the April election. They were not able to vote in person because of age or disability. After checking, the voters had requested ballots for all of 2020 but were not registered as permanent absentee voters. ⁶ Madison and Milwaukee
- The hotline received multiple calls from voters who requested absentee ballots for the April election and did not receive them in time. One voter stated: “I was told my absentee ballot was requested on March 22, 2020 and mailed March 22, 2020. BUT I HAVE NOT RECEIVED IT! I am not able to go a polling place and vote. I am 80 years old, disabled, and ill since Feb. 2020. There are days that I am not even able to get dressed. I want to vote and that is why I ordered an absentee ballot.” ⁶

Uploading ID

- “Requesting the absentee ballot online required uploading a picture of my drivers license. That I could do, but only a portion of my license was displayed and it did not match the full license used in the example so I thought something was wrong.”¹
- “I want to add that I am a HUD Service Coordinator for elderly/disabled housing. I helped many residents register because they had no way to submit their ID to the clerk's office. I really see the inability for many voters to be able to submit voter ID as a major obstacle for many seniors and people with disabilities to vote absentee.”⁵
- “If you're not using a phone, getting the picture into a format and place on your computer that you can upload from. I don't find most

phone apps to be very accessible, and using the web from a phone is practically impossible anymore for a blind person. It would be best to have something prepared in advance that you can use each time.”⁵

- “I didn't know I needed to upload my ID. I did not know how to scan it in.”⁵
- “The requirement to upload my driver's license in order to vote presents an unacceptable security risk for someone who is hard of hearing. If identity theft occurs, a hard of hearing person will face insurmountable hurdles in correcting it due to the phone calls required.”⁵
- “Having to upload my photo ID was quite weird. Why am I uploading to the government that issued the ID.”⁵
- “I had not known of the requirement to upload a copy of my official ID. In the middle of requesting, I stopped to scan my drivers license. When I returned I had to refresh the page. When I did so it did not ask me to upload my ID but let me complete the application without it. I emailed my city clerk with the scanned document.”⁵
- “It [requesting absentee ballot online] was complicated, especially the uploading of my ID. I asked my husband to help me complete the process.”⁵

Finding a witness

- “Signing the envelope and asking a witness to sign and provide his address was a little complicated. I had to read the instructions a couple of times. I wasn't sure if they were asking for my address or the witness' address.”⁵
- “Finding a witness for my absentee ballot is always a bit of an issue, because I don't like to ask someone else to do that. Democracy in the Park was very helpful to me and thousands of other Madison residents; other municipalities should consider similar events.” *Madison voter*¹
- “I made a mistake - I had the witness sign, but I forgot to sign. The clerk called me and gave me a chance to stop in and sign my ballot.”⁵
- The “clerk served as a witness willingly. I live alone and otherwise would have had more trouble voting because of the requirement.” *Tomahawk voter*¹
- “I live alone and did not have a witness for my absentee ballot.”⁵
- “I have never done this before and didn't know I had to have a witness. Since my roommate and most people I know in town are at home with parents, I had no one to be a witness. The municipal clerk

was able to send someone over to be a witness and mail the ballot about a week after I first contacted her, so it did get resolved, but the whole process was extremely overwhelming.”⁵

- “My son came to witness my ballot. None of my neighbors would do so.”⁵
- “Just exactly how is one supposed to get a witness when we're practicing physical distancing? My friend in De Pere said they had drive-up drop off and the person who picked it up witnessed her signature. I was going to play catch at the early voting site for a witness, but as I was leaving my neighbor was pulling out of her garage and witnessed it for me. Lucky for me I read ALL of the instructions carefully. I was going to have my tenants (here on a visa from India) sign it but the instructions stated it had to be a US Citizen. That should have been mentioned more in all of the news stories and information outlets.”⁵
- Two older adult voters who had COVID needed assistance. Each voter requested someone to witness their absentee ballot and to return it. Their neighbors were not able to assist because of COVID. ⁶ South Milwaukee
- Voter with a disability. She was counting on her caregiver to witness her ballot and return it for her, and the caregiver did not show up. The voter asked for help with getting a volunteer to witness her ballot and return it to the absentee drop box. ⁶ Milwaukee

Other

- Call from hospital social worker. Hospitalized voter needed someone to serve as their agent to get their completed absentee application, take it to the clerk, bring their ballot to the hospital, then return the completed ballot to the clerk. ⁶ Milwaukee County

Disability related accommodations

- Blind voter wanted someone to come with him to complete his ballot. It is too late to request an absentee ballot. The Hotline explained that we cannot provide a volunteer, however, he is able to have an assistor of his choice, other than his employer or union representative, complete the ballot as he requested. ⁶
- One thing that really bothers me is that the poll workers/volunteers always talk to the individual that is with me and not directly to me, I’m the person with the with the disability that is voting. I have a huge issue with this! I find it a bit offensive. It’s as if I’m not even standing there. I’m the person with the disability, talk to me. When I bring someone with

me and the poll workers talk to them and not me, my helper always say, "talk to her, she's the voter." Then the poll worker then starts addressing me and continues on with asking for my Photo ID and verifying my address. Having me sign my name always becomes an issue too. I feel the polling locations need to have signature guides available and know how to use them. Whomever I bring with me to assist me at the polls, usually has to line up where I need to sign. I want to be as independent as I can especially at the polls. I plan to bring a signature guide and headphones with me to the November election. ⁶ Milwaukee

- Voter with a disability needed assistance completing his ballot. He requested assistance from a poll worker who had helped him in the past, who said they would assist him. Another poll worker came up and said that was not allowed and that if he wanted to vote, he must do it without assistance. The voter felt humiliated and left without voting. The Hotline provided information on the voter's right to assistance and how to submit a complaint. ⁶ Madison
- Voter did not have fingers and had a family member with them to assist in completing their ballot. The voter was told they were not allowed to have anyone assist them with completing the ballot and would need to do it themselves if they wanted to vote. ⁶
- Older couple in Oconomowoc want to vote in person together but can't stand for long, husband is terminally ill. Explained they could vote curbside or could request a chair to sit on if there is a line. Gave them contact information for the clerk. ⁶ Oconomowoc
- Voter in Kenosha who was ill and could not stand in line was refused accommodation and turned away. She went home, but wanted to go back and try again. We explained about curbside voting and suggested calling the clerk to clarify the process. ⁶ Kenosha

Accessibility for Deaf/ Hard of Hearing Voters

Do poll workers have a way to communicate with voters who are deaf or hard of hearing such as using an easel, signage, or written directions? – According to Election Observer reports, 290/433 (67%) polling sites had a way to communicate.

- Examples of how this was done -
 - Signage/written materials
 - Easel and board (Brown Deer - 23)
 - Signage and trifold boards (Brown Deer - 28)
 - Poll workers fluent in ASL (Delavan - 46) (Hartford - 110)

- One poll worker is deaf and uses sign language (Lake Geneva - 148)
- Pen, paper, signage (Fitchburg - 66)
- Dry erase board (Green Bay - 95)
- TouchPad to write out words (Lake Geneva - 147)
- Have interpreters on call (Milwaukee - 305)
- There are written signs at each station telling the voter what is happening and what they need. (Waterloo - 461)

Lack of Accessible Absentee Ballot

One of the most important roles of clerks and poll workers is to ensure voters of all abilities are able to access their right to vote - whether they choose to vote absentee or in person.¹

- “Once we got the ballots, I was really forced to use a sighted reader (wife). The text format would be too hard to figure out with any standard OCR tool. Even my wife had to read the instructions on the envelope several times to make sure we were doing it right.”⁵
- “Since I am legally blind and the ballot is available in a paper form, I was unable to vote without assistance. While my municipality offers a braille ballot, I did not choose this option. The majority of people with vision loss are not braille readers. Additionally, uploading the ID on my vote is very challenging for those who cannot see. I needed assistance with this task as well.”¹
- I would definitely use an online accessible ballot. I would have no transportation issues and I could vote independently and privately at home. ⁶ Trempealeau County
- For the spring, 2020 election, I failed to cast a vote, a rare occasion, due to recent surgery and the COVIT-19 pandemic. I requested, and received an inaccessible absentee ballot which I could not complete due to quarantining and inability to successfully complete the ballot through the use of AIRA assistance. Having an accessible absentee ballot would have allowed me to exercise the voting franchise which has long been dear to me. I would hope that after 30 years we can now count accessible absentee voting as a right available to those of us with disabilities. ⁶ Milwaukee

Accessible Voting Machine

Difficult to access

- At 10% of polling sites observed by specially trained volunteers, it was not clear to observers if the accessible voting equipment was set up and available for voters to use, which means it was likely more difficult for voters to identify accessible equipment. ¹
- 40% of voters were unaware that there was an accessible machine³

Lack privacy

- At 7% of polling sites observed, the observer reported that the accessible voting equipment was set up, but in a way that did not give voters privacy.¹
- 22% of voters felt that the machine's location provided a private voting experience³

Not Inclusively Promoted

Any voter has the right to use the accessible voting machine.

- "I questioned why the large sign had to say 'Handicapped Voting Machine' instead of something more inclusive. The poll workers were unable to give any reasoning, but did say they would give the feedback to the clerk."⁵
- "[I] was told it was only for people who really needed it"⁵

Other Comments

- I started using voting machines when I moved to Bristol just outside of Sun Prairie. I liked it because I could use my mouth stick to select who I wanted, and it has easy directions to follow. I will probably go back using it after the Covid-19 is over. ⁶ Bristol
- Blind voter: I have used an accessible voting machine since 2008. The machines have always worked well for me. The keyboard is set up and tactilely very easy to use and the audio is easy to understand. Everything has been working well and is always accessible for me to use. This past spring when I voted, I also used gloves while at my polling location due to the pandemic. Also, during the spring primary, the headphone equipment was not available for me to use. This was the first time that no headphones were not available, so I could not utilize the machine. I had brought my niece with me so she could fill

out the paper ballot for me her. I asked the poll workers why there were no headphones and they told me they were taken to a different location. I was very disappointed! When I went again in August to vote, there were only one pair of headphones available, and they had been used by a previous voter and the poll workers had no way to sanitize them since they were foam. I asked to talk to the Section Chief at the polling location, but the Section Chief didn't know where to get additional pairs of headphones from either. So again, I had to have my ballot printed out and then submitted into the ballot machine manually. I plan to bring a sighted guide along again for the November election so they can help me navigate at the polling location. ⁶ Milwaukee

- This is the only way I will vote. (accessible voting machine). In 2016 for the general election, my precinct got a new accessible voting machine and the ballot was on the machine. In the past, my dad would have to print the ballot and then submit it into the machine for me. But, by having this new machine, I felt that I had even more freedom in voting because I could do it all myself. I take pride in voting and always believe my vote is between me and the ballot box. A vote is a vote! So, if I am casting the ballot, no one else is doing it for me. ⁶ Eau Claire

Polling Place Physical Accessibility

Lack of Accessible Parking

- Twenty polling sites did not have clearly marked accessible parking spaces: Black Earth, Fitchburg, Fort Atkinson, Hudson, Keshena, Knapp, Madison, Milwaukee, Monroe, Racine, Waterford, Whitefish Bay, Whitewater, Wisconsin Dells. Two polling places, one in Hudson and one in Milwaukee had neither an accessible parking spot nor an accessible passenger drop-off area.¹
- Parking accessibility was a concern for 58% of voters⁴

Access issues with routes in and out of the building

- 26% of voters with disabilities encountered access concerns with entering or exiting the polling place building.⁵
- Outdoor route accessibility into the building was a concern for 30% of voters⁴
- Route accessibility within the building was a concern for 42% of voters⁴

- “Handicap parking at the door but too much walking inside then must exit far from parking space.”⁵
- Went to her polling place and it was closed and no signage. Did not know where to go to vote, and her neighbors were also unsure. ⁶ Boners Lake.
- I have found that sometimes the architectural accessibility of voting locations can be very difficult to manage. For example, there is early voting at Fiserv Forum in downtown Milwaukee. This would be extremely challenging for someone like me that is blind. How would I even navigate getting into that large of a building and then finding the proper location of where to vote in a building of that type that is so large with multiple floors. It’s nice they opened it up but way too challenging for me. ⁶ Milwaukee

Curbside Voting

- Hotline was contacted on behalf of a voter who has mobility difficulties. They were calling to find out how to get a wheelchair that he could use to get into his polling place. I explained about curbside voting which would allow him to vote without going into the polling place. This will meet his needs – his neighbor is giving the voter a ride and he is able to walk to the car. ⁶ West Allis
- Voter went to his polling place and requested curbside voting. He was told that he had to go to a different polling place if he wanted curbside voting. He called the Hotline for assistance. ⁶ Milwaukee
- Daughter wanted to find out about curbside voting for her parents and understand how it works and how to access it. ⁶ Oshkosh, WI.
- Voter contacted the hotline about lack of curbside voting in Green Bay. The caller and his wife have mobility issues and were unable to wait in the long lines. They tried twice during the day to access curbside voting and asked around attempting to get assistance. They could not get through to anyone at the clerk’s office or other elected officials. Curbside voting was not available, as a result they were not able to vote. ⁶ Green Bay, April 2020 election
- My husband and I are both disabled. We had driven to the voting site five times throughout the day and the line was so long Neither my husband or I can stand in line for four hours because of health issues therefore we did not get a chance to vote. ⁶ Green Bay, April 2020
- Inquiry from two Milwaukee wheelchair users who have difficulty entering their polling place and wanted to know about how to access

curbside voting. They waited in line for a long time. Police told them to leave at 8 PM but they had not submitted their ballots yet... "they tried to explain that they were completing ballots and what was going on and the officer kept saying that they needed to leave because it was 8. Thankfully, a poll worker ran over and explained." The flashing lights from the police car were alarming because the passenger has a seizure disorder and the flashing lights could trigger a seizure. AT 9 PM cars were still lined up to vote. The long car line was for curbside voting. All of the folks in the almost 100 car line were people who had disabilities or fit into one of the high risk categories.

⁶ Milwaukee

- In some locations, voters had to ask a friend, relative or some other person walking into the polling place to notify poll workers of curbside voting needs. *Observed in Brown Deer and Fort Atkinson*¹
- Caller from Racine county wants to vote but has no transportation and cannot wait in line due to age and mobility. Suggested curbside voting and provided names of local agencies that might be able to help with transportation. ⁶ Racine.

Hard to read signage, lack of signage, or poorly placed signage

- The sign with information on whom to call for curbside voting was on a small, hard to read piece of paper taped to the door. *Observed in Rock County*¹
- The sign about curbside voting was inside an entryway, which therefore required a voter to get out of the car to find the information. *Observed in Kenosha and LaCrosse*¹
- Some locations do not have signage. *Observed in Caledonia, Monona, and Stoughton*^{1, 5}
- There was no signage. After waiting for someone to come out, the voter's friend had to walk inside the building to get a worker to come out and help with the curbside voting. ⁶

Confusing for voters

- Some municipalities had plans for curbside voting that differed from one polling place to another within the municipality.¹

Voters in Care Facilities (see also Photo ID)

- The hotline was contacted on behalf of individual with a disability who lives in a group home in northern Wisconsin. He was told that if he

left the facility to vote in person, he would not be allowed to return. He expressed interest in absentee voting but did not know how to request a ballot; the group home did not provide assistance. Although he wanted to vote, he was afraid of the threat that he would become homeless if he left to vote, so did not participate in the election. We offered to assist with how to request an absentee ballot. ⁶ Hayward

- Assisted living staff called to ask about transportation resources for residents who wanted to vote, but had no transportation. ⁶ Glendale
- Resident of Trempealeau County Health Care Center at this time – has a different county of residence. Was not sure how to vote and if he needed to get a new Photo ID for this address. Explained that he can submit a request for an absentee ballot using his county of residence as his address. ⁶ Trempealeau
- Caller is assisting nursing home resident to request an absentee ballot. They are concerned about signatures not being accepted on absentee ballot. The Hotline explained about the process for a witness to certify absentee ballot. ⁶
- Caller is being asked to by residents to assist them to register to vote and to request absentee ballots, and needs information. We shared information from WEC, as well as DVC. ⁶ Kewaskum
- Resident of group home. She received an absent ballot for the primary. No one helped her with it so she was unable to vote. ⁶ Waukesha
- Staff from care facility called. A newer resident wants to vote. The staff have tried to assist her with getting an absentee ballot, and registration – she was registered at her previous address. Staff said the clerk has not been responsive to call and messages. ⁶ Lake Mills
- Family Care case manager asked about trainings and resources to help residents in small adult family homes or CBRFs. Many are interested in voting but most do not have photo ID or transportation. They need information and support from staff. ⁶ Works with members in southeastern Wisconsin
- 33 year nursing home resident. Had to give up her apartment and is stuck in nursing home for now. No one is able to provide assistance with voting questions. Asked about what she should use as her address for voting. She is hoping to leave nursing home but waiting for Family Care to make community placement and it has taken months. ⁶ Clinton

- Assisted living staff to make sure it was acceptable for her to witness a resident's absentee ballot. The resident asked the staffperson to sign the certificate but the staff person was anxious to make sure she was doing the right thing. ⁶ Jefferson

Photo ID

- Caller wants to vote but does not have a current photo ID. He wanted a ride to get to the DMV but needs an accessible vehicle because he used a powerchair. I told him about the new south side DMV location. He was very excited because he could get there himself using his powerchair and wouldn't have to try to get transportation which can be difficult to schedule. ⁶ Madison
- Caller reported that her brother has been without photo ID for over three years. He is enrolled in Family Care and has repeatedly asked Family Care to have someone help him get one. He has no transportation and also needs help completing the forms at DMV.⁶ Milwaukee County
- Group home operator called to request guidance on how to support her residents to vote. None of them have photo IDs. She had never heard of Special Voting Deputies. We explained about how to obtain photo ID. Since the election was only a week away, and COVID restricted travel, she decided not to take action.⁶ Waukesha County
- "My brother lived in Monroe County. He wanted to vote but did not have a photo ID. He was wheelchair bound and needed a medical van or cab. I asked his social worker to get him to DMV. She never would help get his ID. He had MS and couldn't be he the heat or cold. His last year of his life he was bedridden and still wanted to vote..... but could not vote because he didn't have a photo ID." ⁶
- My son who is 18 with autism would like to vote. He does not have a WI ID. Can he still vote? ⁶
- Older adult did not have current photo ID. She cast a provisional ballot. She needed transportation and someone to assist her to go to DMV to get a photo ID and then to the municipal clerks office to show her ID, and cure her provisional ballot. She had a mobility disability and needed someone to assist her with going into the DMV and clerk's office. ⁶ Milwaukee
- The caller wants to register to vote but their state ID has their old address. The Hotline voter could register if they had proof of residency (such as utility bill) for the new address. The state ID could be used for

proof of identity for voting, even if it does not have current address. ⁶
Stevens Point

- Voter is worried that her ID does not have a star and that she will not be able to vote. ⁶
- Staff from long term care facility in Chippewa Falls. Resident wants to vote and does not have photo ID. Wanted to understand the options. ⁶
- Staff from nursing home wanted guidance. Most of our residents do not have photo ID and they want to vote. What do we do? ⁶ Niagara

Transportation

Note: The Hotline receives a high volume of calls from people who need transportation. This is just a representative sample.

- *"I usually have a friend who will assist me in getting to the polls. If I didn't, transportation to the polls would be the hardest part...I can't walk safely to my polling location and we do not have Uber or Lyft either."*⁶
Blind voter in Trempealeau County
- Janesville voter with limited vision and hearing needed a ride to vote. We shared the service available from the county, but she could not afford the co-pay of \$5 each way. We were able to work with local contacts to overcome this barrier so she could obtain transportation.
- Voter who lived in group home and was under guardianship wanted to vote. The group home and the guardian said they were too busy to provide transportation or help him find a ride. We offered to help him find a ride. He was initially excited, but then decided it is too much work for other people to take him and he does not want to put people out; he accepted that he cannot vote due to transportation. ⁶ St. Croix County.
- J. is an older voter who had a stroke and uses a walker. He needed transportation to his polling place and guidance on the documents he needed to register to vote. His registration was at a previous address. ⁶
Brown Deer
- Voter with a disability who has completed absentee ballot but has no way to deliver it. Mail will not get it there in time. Asked for assistance with ballot delivery. ⁶ Racine
- Son with disability does not have way to get to his polling place. Can we assist with transportation. ⁶ Grafton
- 90 year old voter in Green Bay. Wanted to vote, but had no transportation to get to polling place for April election. ⁶ Green Bay

- Nonprofit staff trying to help community member with an intellectual disability get a ride to the polls. ⁶ Appleton.

Statements from Indefinitely Confined Voters

Wisconsin's Indefinitely Confined provision allows voters to self certify that they are "*indefinitely confined because of age, illness, infirmity, or disability and request absentee ballots be sent to me automatically until I am no longer confined or I fail to return a ballot.*" These are some examples of disabled Wisconsin voters who rely on the Indefinitely Confined provision to exercise their right to vote.

63 year old Voter with Cerebral Palsy

I'm a 63-year-old woman with Cerebral Palsy. Since 1989, I have lived in my own wheelchair accessible apartment with the help of come in home health aides. I use an electric wheelchair, and I'm unable to get into a car. I need a wheelchair equipped vehicle, and use the County Paratransit van to get around. It's my only means of transportation. I am grateful to have it, but you have to schedule a ride two days in advance, and you have to allow a lot of waiting time on both ends because it is a shared ride service. It would be very difficult to vote using the Paratransit van, because I wouldn't know two days in advance when to tell them to come back, and would probably also have to ride around for awhile on the way to vote. The process would involve a lot of time, trouble and planning, and waiting in a location I wasn't familiar with. Even though I believe that my vote is very important, I doubt that I would do it much, even before Covid, because of the logistical and safety issues. I think it was my social worker they told me how to get an absentee ballot back in 1989 when I first moved out on my own. I was told at that time that as long as I always returned my ballot, I would continue to get them and I have voted in every election since then. I rely on continuing to get my absentee ballot.. My physical condition isn't going to get better, and in fact I get less mobile as I get older, so having to reapply every time wouldn't make sense, and would probably make me miss elections. I really hope they leave things the way they are.

58 year old voter with autoimmune disease

I became suddenly disabled in 2014 after developing post viral autoimmune diseases. One of these, dysautonomia, causes extreme fluctuations in blood pressure and heart rate, among other symptoms. As there is no generally accepted cause of and no cure for dysautonomia, my condition is chronic.

Like others with autoimmune disease I am immunocompromised. Because of this I have been housebound since 2014, only leaving the house for medical and physical therapy appointments. Among the reasons for this is that I am physically unable to stand for greater than a few minutes at a time without symptoms, including the extreme blood pressure issues mentioned earlier.

I have voted in every election since I turned 18 years old and feel very strongly that it is every citizen's right and responsibility to do so. The emphasis is on responsibility as well as a right. On the advice of my physician, a year after I became ill, I applied for indefinite confinement so that I could continue to vote, and I have done so in every election since. Those of us who are disabled are marginalized in virtually every aspect of For people with significant health issues or due to age, providing a photo ID, just physically getting to the Division of Motor Vehicles to obtain one, can be impossible and therefore jeopardizes their ability to participate in our democracy. Requiring people with disabilities and the aged to upload a photo ID to a website can also be an insurmountable challenge. Not only because of the cost of the computer, scanner and internet connection but also because they may not physically be capable of getting to a location to complete the process if they lack these necessary items.

39 year old on Dialysis

D. has been voting as an IC absentee voter since 2016. When D. went online to get her absentee ballot in 2016, she was in the hospital. She knew that she would need to always ask for one. She saw online that Indefinitely Confined was an option (which she didn't know about prior to this) and realized this was an appropriate option for her. D. is a patient on dialysis. Because of her struggles with dialysis, she's begun having lots of other health issues, including skin lesions, mobility difficulties, and stroke. Dee uses a walker most of the time. She estimates that she is ambulatory with her walker about 80% of the time. D. says that even leaving the house is difficult to do. In public places, people will unintentionally bump or crowd her. This makes her very nervous and anxious about even going places.

28 year old with multiple disabilities

J. lives with his parents and family. His parents serve as his guardian. J. needs support with reading and completing his ballot. With all of the commotion at the polling place, this is more easily done at home for him. There is less stress and confusion if he is able to vote at home. Although polling places are required to be ADA compliant, physical accessibility can be

difficult for J. as well, so voting at home alleviates these problems. When J. went to court for his guardianship hearing, it was very important to him and to his family that he retain his right to vote. The GAL was initially not very supportive of this, but his parents worked with the GAL to help her understand that J. understood and could participate in the voting process. When J. turned 18, he went with his parents to the Municipal Clerk's office to register. Upon registering, they requested Indefinitely Confined voter status right away. J. has always been an indefinitely confined voter.

60 year old Voter with MS

I am a 60-year old person who has been living with relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis, a progressive, central nervous system disease, since 2004. My physical balance and walking has declined to the point that I have needed to use assistive devices, including wheelchairs sometimes, for the past few years. Although I am able to live independently, I have to use adaptive modifications and hired assistance to be able to have many household needs and activities taken care of.

I became indefinitely confined in the spring of 2020, realizing that my health condition places me in the high-risk group for covid-19. Being able to vote from home not only removed the burden of wondering about, and trying to figure out how I would navigate the mobility issues and possible barriers involved with delivering my ballot to the ballot box, it also removed the risk that I would have endured by potentially exposing myself to covid-19. To be able to vote this way is priceless—without this means, many of us would not be able to have our voices--through our votes-- count.

28 year old with multiple disabilities

J. lives with his parents and family. His parents serve as his guardian. J. needs support with reading and completing his ballot. With all of the commotion at the polling place, this is more easily done at home for him. Although polling places are required to be ADA compliant, physical accessibility can be difficult for J. as well, so voting at home alleviates these problems. When J. went to court for his guardianship hearing, it was very important to him and to his family that he retain his right to vote. The GAL was initially not very supportive of this, but his parents worked with the GAL to help her understand that J. understood and could participate in the voting process. When J. turned 18, he went with his parents to the Municipal Clerk's office to register. Upon registering, they requested Indefinitely Confined voter status right away. J. has always been an indefinitely confined voter.

COVID Related Lack of Access

Felt health was compromised due to voting

- 61% of voters with disabilities indicated that they did not feel safe voting in person in the April 7, 2020 election.⁵
- "TOO CROWDED... I felt my health was at risk when I have to worry about my disability (Immune system)"⁵
- "Building ... unsafe for people with asthma and polling workers were walking closer than 6 ft. No masks available for people forced to vote in person."⁵
- "My health was at risk with the crowd."⁵
- Only about 25% of the poll workers were wearing masks, which could be a public health risk. Some seemed nervous about me because I was following CDC guidelines and wearing a mask."⁵
- "Did not honor 6 ft distancing. Blocking pathways. Walking up to patrons. I had to put my hands up and say stop. They had PPE but voters did not."⁵
- At 13 polling sites in Appleton, Grafton, Green Bay, Hudson, Knapp, Town of Stanton, South Milwaukee, Town of Waterford, Town of Farmington, Town of Newport observers reported that poll workers weren't wearing masks.⁵
- At 45 polling sites it was reported that poll workers did not have methods set up to maintain social distancing. ⁵
- The Hotline received calls from several voters who were concerned that some poll workers were not wearing masks. ⁶ Hancock, Madison, Franklin

Problematic for deaf voters

- "Due to masks being worn, communication was seriously impaired for me due to deafness. Repeatedly had to declare the need for visual communication. Some election volunteers tried to accommodate but gesturing, pointing, etc. some kept talking behind their mask. It was frustrating. When an error occurred on my ballot, the volunteer tried to explain what she needed to do next. I wasn't able to comprehend her information. She gestured me to wait. She returned with a new ballot for me to complete. I was able to figure out on my own what I did wrong on the ballot and could successfully vote. This voting experience was the most frustrating experience I have ever had. Election volunteers came out to the long giving directions and information about things I had no access to. Social distancing was supposed to be enforced per the blue tape along the walk. There were

signs explaining what we needed to do. There were no literatures sharing out information on maintaining social distancing, what to expect once we got to the poll area with mixed wards, who to seek help from, what the people with tablets could assist voters with, where to find a bathroom, check to see if you were at the right polling place, and so forth. I was in line to vote for 2.25 hours with people wearing a mask and without access to any form of communication with any one.”⁵

Lack of early in-person voting prevented voters from voting

- Early in-person voting was inaccessible due to covid-19 (town offices closed to the public). “Calling the town office to request an in-person appointment was not possible because 711 caption phone calls are not effective. Covid-19 poses an extremely serious risk for hard of hearing people due to inaccessibility of care. We can not call our health providers because captions are ineffective and videocalls are unavailable as an initial point-of-contact. Also, if we end up getting seriously ill and are brought to a hospital, we cannot lipread due to the use of face masks. Therefore in-person voting is the only viable option, and poses extra-ordinarily high health risks for hard of hearing individuals. Three people in my family did not vote for these reasons.”⁵

Resources

- 1 [LWV Election Protection Report 2020](#)
- 2 [NDRN Survey 2020](#)
- 3 [SABE Survey 2018](#)
- 4 [Disability Vote Coalition Survey 2018](#)
- 5 Disability Vote Coalition April 2020 Survey
- 6 Voter experience shared with DRW Voter Hotline or coalition members