

Voter Advocacy Training

Update on 2021 Wisconsin Legislation and How to Take Action

April 13, 2021



*A project of Disability Rights Wisconsin and the Wisconsin
Board for People with Developmental Disabilities.*

Meeting Logistics

1. Captioning: Click on the Live Transcript CC icon to use captioning, or to turn it off. Then click “show subtitle”. Click “view full transcript” to see the full captioning stream.
2. ASL Interpreters are available. You may pin the interpreter. If you need to communicate directly w/interpreter, note that in the Q & A.
3. Enter questions in the chat. We will answer as many as possible, and can follow up after the briefing.

What We Will Cover Today

- ▶ Review the voting bills, including those scheduled for public hearings.
- ▶ Identify Key Dates and Contacts
- ▶ How to Take Action
 - ▶ Providing Testimony for a public hearing
 - ▶ Contacting Your Legislators
 - ▶ Media Engagement
 - ▶ Resources
 - ▶ Next Steps
- ▶ Complete our survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DVCAdvocacyTrg>

Voting Bills Introduced February 2021

- ▶ Part of a national trend to limit voting rights following the 2020 elections and the pandemic.
- ▶ The bills would:
 - ▶ Make it harder to vote for many voters with a disability and older adults.
 - ▶ Make it more difficult for friends and neighbors to assist you with returning an absentee ballot.
 - ▶ Restrict workers in nursing homes and group homes from offering residents assistance with voting.
 - ▶ Threaten volunteers, clerks, and others with prosecution for violating the new barriers.

Hearings on Bills: Important Dates

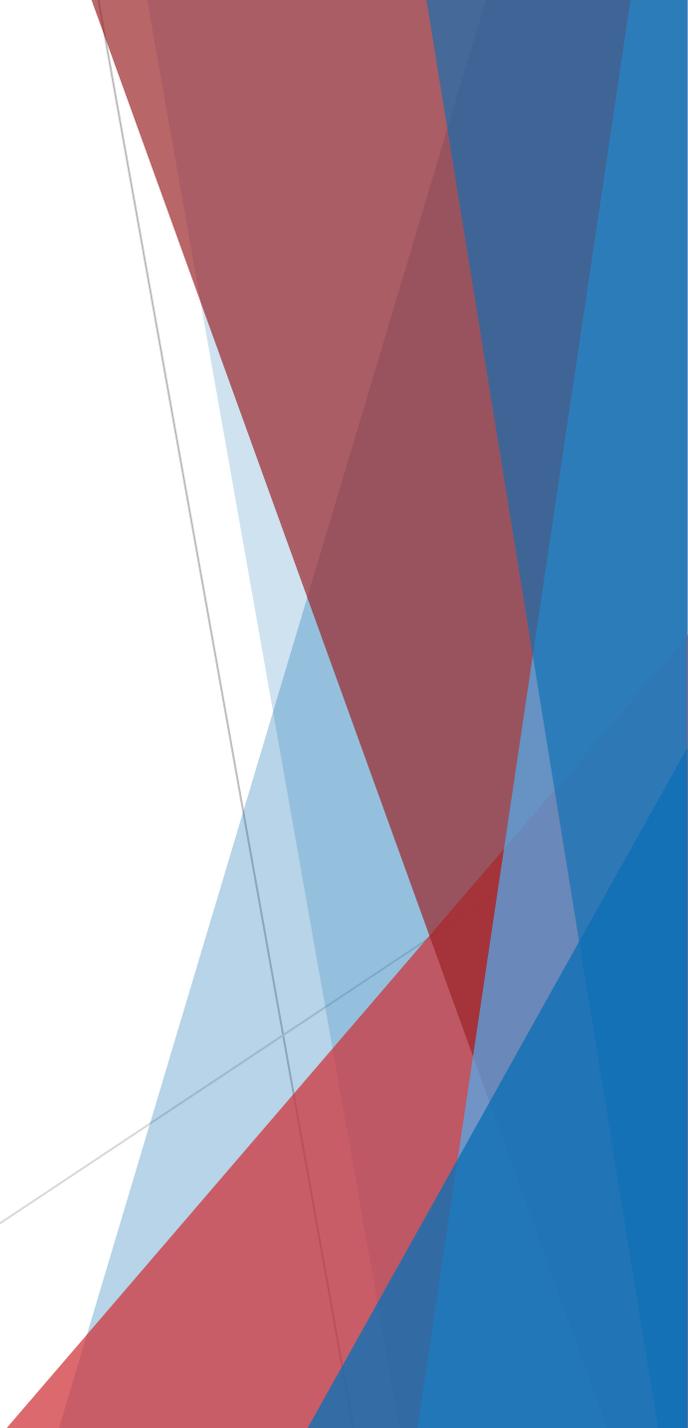
- ▶ April 14 at 10 AM, [Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections](#) - Public Hearing
 - Includes AB 173 and AB 198
 - Rep. Brandtjen, Chair
 - [Link to hearing notice](#)

- ▶ April 15 at 10 AM [Senate Committee on Elections](#), Election Process Reform and Ethics - Public Hearing
 - Includes SB 204, SB 205, SB 214
 - Sen. Bernier, Chair
 - [Link to hearing notice](#)

2021 Voting Bills

- ▶ 13 bills introduced so far and more are expected.
- ▶ Majority introduced by Sen. Stroebel & Darling.
- ▶ Three Senate hearings will be held. The first two are expected to be April 8th and 15th with a third to follow. The 4/8 hearing likely does **not** include the bills we are focused on - the 4/15 will.
- ▶ Companion Assembly Bills were also released.

Bills for April 14 Assembly Hearing



SB 207/AB 173 - private resources used for an election/appointment of poll workers

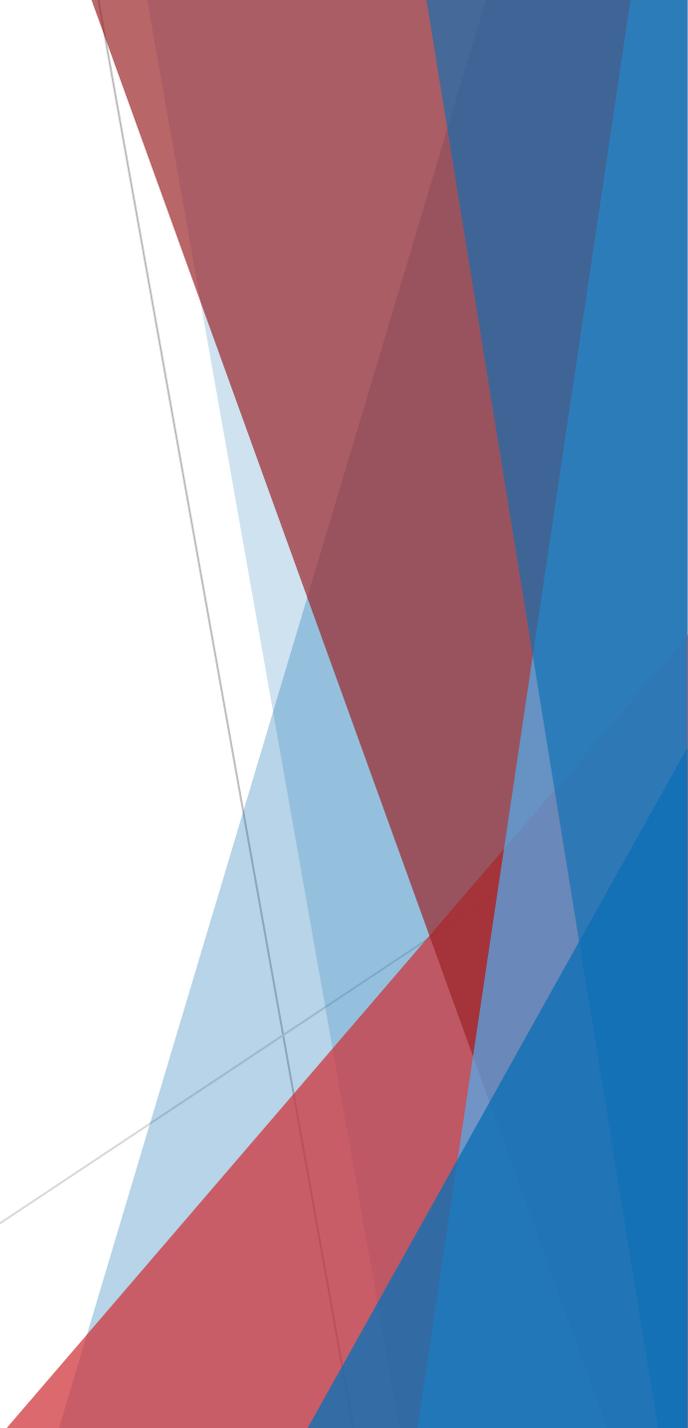
- ▶ Would restrict who can serve as a poll worker. Employees of an issue advocacy group would not be able to serve as poll workers. Wisconsin currently has a shortage of poll workers.
- ▶ Would prohibit municipalities from applying for or accepting donations or grant moneys for purposes of election administration.
 - ▶ Some municipalities have used donations and grant funding to address accessibility and curbside voting.
 - ▶ Grant funding was used to fund health and safety precautions during COVID.
- ▶ Assembly hearing Wednesday 4/14

SB 212/ AB 198

Defects on Absentee Ballot Certificates

- ▶ Prohibits a municipal clerk from correcting a defect on the completed absentee ballot certificate envelope.
- ▶ If a certificate envelope has a defect, the clerk must return the ballot to the elector and post a notification of the defect on the elector's voter information page on MyVote website. Would not reach voters who cannot access MyVote; they would be unaware of the problem - such as a witness not including an address.
- ▶ The timeline to return the ballot to the voter and for the voter to resubmit may not allow time for the vote to be counted.
- ▶ *Assembly hearing Wednesday 4/14*

Bills for April 15 Senate Hearing



SB 204/ AB 201

Absentee Ballot Applications

- ▶ This bill makes it more difficult to absentee vote.
- ▶ Eliminates the option for indefinitely confined voters to receive absentee ballots automatically for every election.
- ▶ Would require all indefinitely confined voters to provide a photo ID with their absentee ballot request.
- ▶ Prohibits the WI Election Commission, clerks, and other groups from sending absentee ballot applications to all eligible voters; makes it a felony to mail absentee ballot applications to anyone who has not requested one.
- ▶ *Senate hearing Thursday 4/15*

What is an Indefinitely Confined Voter?

- ▶ Permanent absentee voters due to age, illness or disability.
- ▶ If a voter has a hard time leaving their home to vote, due to age, illness, infirmity, or disability, and always wants to vote absentee, he/she may request an absentee ballot for every election and certify he/she is “**indefinitely confined because of age, illness, infirmity, or disability**”.
- ▶ Legislature passed Photo ID Law in 2011: exempted permanent absentee voters from having to provide a copy of their photo ID.
- ▶ These voters are allowed a substitution under state law. Their witness verifies their identity and certifies to that by signing the return envelope. State law requires the witness to verify the name and address of the indefinitely confined voter “in lieu of providing proof of identification.” [Wis Stats 6.87\(4\)\(b\)2](#).

SB 205 / AB 179

Absentee Voting in residential care facilities

- ▶ Would limit voting rights of nursing home and group home residents.
- ▶ If staff offered to provide a resident with assistance, this would be a felony: *“No employee of a qualified retirement home ... may influence an occupant of the home or facility to apply for or not apply for an absentee ballot or cast or refrain from casting a ballot.”* May conflict with federal law which requires nursing homes support the right of residents to vote.
- ▶ This bill would require the administrator of the facility to notify relatives of the residents as to when the special voting deputies will be coming to the facility to assist in the casting of absentee ballots.
- ▶ *Senate hearing Thursday 4/15*

SB 214: re early canvassing of absentee ballots, combined polling places

- ▶ Allows municipal clerks to start canvassing the absentee ballots the day before the election.
- ▶ Authorizes any city, village, or town with a population of less than 35,000 to enter into an agreement to share a polling place with an adjacent city, village, or town also having a population of less than 35,000.
- ▶ Transportation is already a significant barrier for many voters, combining polling sites would only increase this challenge.
- ▶ *Senate hearing Thursday 4/15*

Other Bills - Not Scheduled for
Hearing Yet

SB 206/AB 180 Returning Absentee Indefinitely Confined Voter

- ▶ Would limit voting rights of voters who certify as “indefinitely confined”.
- ▶ Voters would be required to provide statements under oath.
- ▶ Voters under 65 would need to have their statements signed by their doctors. A false statement would be a felony.
- ▶ Voters would need to renew their status every two years. Currently, these voters receive an absentee ballot for every election for as long as they need it.
- ▶ We want to work with policy makers to update and clarify the “indefinitely Confined” voter status.

*Note: If a voter has a hard time getting to the polls on Election Day due to age, illness, infirmity, or disability, he/she may request an absentee ballot for every election and certify he/she is “**indefinitely confined because of age, illness, infirmity, or disability**”. An indefinitely confined voter does not need to show a Photo ID when voting by absentee ballot.*

SB 209/AB 177 Returning Absentee Ballots/ Ballot Drop Boxes

- ▶ Requires voters to either mail or drop off their absentee ballots at the permanent location of the clerk's office.
- ▶ Limits drop box locations to a location attached to the clerk's permanent office. Reducing drop box locations will limit options for nondrivers and other voters to return their absentee ballot.
- ▶ Sets standards for drop boxes including that they be tamper resistant, moisture-proof, and satisfy the accessibility requirements under the federal Americans with Disabilities Act.

SB 203 / AB 192: Secure delivery of absentee ballots

- Would limit options to obtain and return absentee ballots.
- Prohibits any individual from helping more than one non-family member to return their absentee ballot.
- Limits who can return a voter's absentee ballot to the voter's immediate family or legal guardian, with very limited exceptions.
- *“If the voter is unable to deliver the absentee ballot and has no legal guardian or immediate family residing in this state, the voter may designate, in writing, one person who is a registered voter in this state to deliver the ballot, except that the voter may not designate a candidate on the ballot nor compensate the person to deliver the ballot.”*

Make Your Advocacy Plan

- ▶ Contact your legislators to share your concerns.
- ▶ Speak at a Public Hearing or submit written comments. Speakers are needed for April hearings.
- ▶ Invite us to speak to your group.
- ▶ Submit an Op-Ed or letter to the editor.
- ▶ Interview with radio or tv
- ▶ Strategic use of social media
- ▶ Resources: Toolkit, Voting Bills, co-sponsor list

Key Points for messaging

- ▶ Tell how the voting bills will impact you and may make it harder for many Wisconsinites with disabilities and older adults to vote.
- ▶ Share the barriers that you or other voters with disabilities or older adults may experience, such as transportation, no photo ID, accessibility issues, etc.
- ▶ Ask them to work with the disability and aging communities to address barriers to voting, ensure accessible elections, and make it easier for citizens to participate.

Key Elections Committees

Assembly Campaigns & Elections -
Members:

- ▶ Representative Brandtjen (Chair)
- ▶ Representative Sanfelippo (Vice-Chair)
- ▶ Representative Tusler
- ▶ Representative Thiesfeldt
- ▶ Representative Murphy
- ▶ Representative Rozar
- ▶ Representative Spreitzer
- ▶ Representative Subeck
- ▶ Representative Emerson

Committee Clerk: Bill Savage -

Bill.Savage@legis.wisconsin.gov

Contact information Assembly Reps:

<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2021/legislators/assembly>

Senate Elections, Election Process Reform
and Ethics - Members:

- ▶ Senator Bernier (Chair)
- ▶ Senator Darling (Vice-Chair)
- ▶ Senator Stroebel
- ▶ Senator Smith
- ▶ Senator Roys

Committee Clerk: Nathan Duerkop -

Nathan.Duerkop@legis.wisconsin.gov

Contact information Senators:

<https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2021/legislators/senate>

Upcoming Public Hearings

- ▶ April 14 at 10 AM, Assembly Committee on Campaigns and Elections - Public Hearing
 - ▶ Includes AB 173 and AB 198
 - ▶ Rep. Brandtjen, Chair
- ▶ April 15 at 10 AM Senate Committee on Elections, Election Process Reform and Ethics - Public Hearing
 - ▶ Includes SB 204, SB 205, SB 211, SB 214
 - ▶ Sen. Bernier, Chair

Options & Tips for Providing Testimony

- ▶ Oral testimony
 - ▶ In-person
 - ▶ Virtual
- ▶ Other options
 - ▶ Written testimony sent by email
 - ▶ On a hearing slip - Check the box indicating you are “Not Speaking” but are “in favor” or “against” a bill
 - ▶ Contact your legislator

Sample Testimony

[Your Name and a brief introduction about yourself (where you live, volunteer, work, etc.)]

I am concerned about the following bills (list the bill numbers) because they will make it harder for me (or people I care about) to vote.

[Tell your story: talk about how these bills will personally make it harder for you or someone you know to vote.]

As an American, few things are more important to me than my right to vote and ensuring all people, including people with disabilities, have that same opportunity. Please vote to support accessible and inclusive elections.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]

Contacting Your State Legislators

- ▶ Things to keep in mind
 - ▶ You are helping them do their job by informing them how these voting bills could impact you.
 - ▶ The best way to let your legislator know how you feel about the voting bills is to share a specific voting story they will remember.
 - ▶ Most legislators want to get to know you and see you as a resource.
 - ▶ If a legislator hears from 5 to 7 constituents about a topic, they pay attention.

Contacting Your State Legislators -3 main ways to contact them

- ▶ Meet with them in person (or Zoom)
 - ▶ Legislators in their home district on Mondays and Fridays
 - ▶ Meetings 20 minutes or less
- ▶ Send an email or letter
 - ▶ Try to avoid a form letter or make sure you personalize it with your story to make it stand out.
- ▶ Call their office
 - ▶ It's ok to ask your legislator to call you back and ok to just talk to the staffer

No matter how you contact your legislator, be sure to give your name, address and hometown so they can verify you are a constituent.

Contacting Your State Legislators - What to Keep in Mind

- ▶ Be specific and clear
- ▶ Stay focused, stay on topic
- ▶ Know the bill number you are referring to
- ▶ It's ok to disagree with their position but don't argue
- ▶ If you don't know the answer to a question, don't guess! Just tell them you will follow up with the answer.
- ▶ You can provide 1 or 2 brief handouts if they emphasize your points. Know what's on the handout.
- ▶ Be clear about your ask and set deadlines for getting a response back from their office.
- ▶ Be persistent. Follow up if you don't hear by that deadline.

Contacting Your State Legislators

- ▶ To find out who your legislators are:
 - ▶ Call the Legislative Hotline at 1-800-362-9472 or
 - ▶ Click on “Who Are My Legislators?” on the [Wisconsin State Legislature Home Page](#)

Contacting Your State Legislators - Examples

- ▶ Calling your legislator for an appointment or to talk about the bill.
 - ▶ Hi, I'm Jenny Neugart and I live at 123 Main Street in Fort Atkinson. I'd like to set up an appointment to talk to Rep/Senator _____ about voting bills SB 204/AB 201. I'm concerned about how the bill will impact my ability to vote absentee. When would the legislator be available to talk?

Contacting Your State Legislators - Examples

Dear Senator [Insert Last Name]:

My name is [Insert Your Name] and I reside at [Insert Your Address] in [Insert Your City]. I am writing you to talk about my concerns with SB 204.

This bill will make it harder for me to vote absentee. [Share how it personally impacts you as a voter with a disability].

I am asking for you to reach out to the disability community to learn more about how this bill will make it significantly harder for people with a disability like myself to vote. I am happy to be a resource and connect you to other resources like the WI Disability Vote Coalition.

Thank you for your time and considering my request.

Sincerely, [Insert Your Name and home address]

Contacting state legislators - Example

Email Subject Line: Include the bill numbers

Dear Sen./Rep. ***[Name of Elected Official]***,

I am writing to share my concerns about the following bills because they will make it harder to vote (add the number of the bills you are concerned about). **[Briefly introduce yourself – if you live in the district, where you volunteer, work, etc]**

As an American, few things are more important to me than my right to vote and ensuring all people, regardless of their disability, age, race, or where they live, have that same opportunity.

[Tell your story: explain about how these bills will personally make it harder for you or someone you know to vote.]

For these reasons and more, I ask you to vote against these bills and to support accessible and inclusive elections. Thank you for reading my email and taking my voice into consideration.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Your Email]

[Your Address]

Media Engagement

Write an Op-Ed to your local paper

- ▶ Submit the Op-Ed to the paper's editor
- ▶ Write a strong opening statement that's short and to the point - your first sentence should grab the reader.
- ▶ Don't use insulting or derogatory language, keep to the facts.
- ▶ End on a strong note. Appeal to the readers' highest values.
- ▶ Keep your Op-Ed under 400 words or if you write a Letter to the Editor, keep it under 200 words.

Media Engagement

Get your local paper to write a personal interest story

- ▶ This is an opportunity to share your personal story
- ▶ How does it affect others in the community?

Contact your local radio station such as NPR

- ▶ Local radio stations generally have a segment on issues that impact the community
- ▶ Come prepared to discuss the issues and know what you're talking about
- ▶ Include others that have been impacted

Media Engagement

Contact your local television station

- ▶ Local television stations generally run community interest stories in their afternoon news segment
- ▶ Again, come prepared to discuss the issues and know what you're talking about
- ▶ Involve
- ▶ Make the viewers understand why the issue is important and how it impacts the community

Sample letter to the editor

Dear Editor,

The Wisconsin legislature recently proposed a package of bills that would make it harder for many people to vote, including many people with disabilities and older adults.

Rather than ensuring all residents have fair access to the ballot, the legislature is considering bills that would make it harder for many people to vote, especially people with disabilities and older adults. The bills would threaten volunteers and clerks with prosecution for violating the new restrictions in the bills, and forbid workers in residential care facilities and retirement homes from even encouraging residents to vote.

[add any specific provisions in the bills that matter to you]

As an American, few things are more important to me than my right to vote and ensuring all people, regardless of their disability, age, race, or where they live, have that same opportunity.

[Tell your story: explain about how these bills will personally make it harder for you or someone you know to vote.]

There are many opportunities to improve our elections by making our polling places more accessible, and making it easier to register to vote by offering Automatic Voter Registration at the DMV, and more options for early voting. I am asking legislators to work with disability and aging groups to help make our elections more accessible and inclusive. Our democracy works best when citizens can participate in our elections.

Sincerely, [Your Name] [Your Email] [Your Address]

Resources

- ▶ Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition: <https://disabilityvote.org/>
- ▶ Action alert on Committee Hearings: <https://disabilityvote.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/WDVC-Voting-Bills-Public-Hearings-4-13-21-acc.pdf>
- ▶ Wisconsin Voting Rights Coalition Toolkit: https://conservationvoters.org/assets/images/2021_03_26-Toolkit-Response-to-Anti-Voter-Bills-UPDATED_3_26.pdf
- ▶ Read more tips on Wisconsin Conservation Voters' [activist toolkit webpage](#).
- ▶ For tips on [how to engage with your elected officials](#), visit this toolkit from the ACLU of Wisconsin.
- ▶ Questions? Call the DRW Voter Hotline at 1-844-347-8683 / 1-844-DIS-VOTE or email info@disabilityvote.org

Next Steps

- ▶ Action: Live your advocacy plan
- ▶ Complete our survey:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DVCAdvocacyTrg>
- ▶ To learn more or to volunteer, talk to Barbara or Jenny, or email us at info@disabilityvote.org