



1-844-DIS-VOTE  
www.disabilityvote.org

## **Disability Vote Coalition Speaks Out on Voting Bills: June 9 at 9 AM**

This briefing will feature Wisconsin voters with disabilities and older adults, discussing how bills being voted on in the Legislature June 9th will create new barriers and make it harder for indefinitely confined voters and for nursing home and group home residents to vote. We will also share highlights of our recent survey regarding the bills. The Disability Vote Coalition calls on policymakers to oppose these new barriers and safeguard the rights of voters with disabilities and older adults.

### **The following voters will share their perspective:**

- Cindy Bentley, Glendale
- Dee Her, Sun Prairie
- Noreen Holmes, La Crosse
- Adam Sharp, West Bend

### **Moderated by:**

- Jenny Neugart, Wisconsin BPDD, WI Disability Vote Coalition
- Barbara Beckert, Disability Rights Wisconsin, WI Disability Vote Coalition

See briefing resource packet for additional information.

### **Briefing Hosted by the [Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition](#)**

*The WDVC is a non-partisan effort to help ensure full participation in the entire electoral process of voters with disabilities, including registering to vote, casting a vote, and accessing polling places. The Coalition is coordinated by Disability Rights Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities. Members include people with disabilities, community agencies, and other partners.*

Question? Contact Barbara Beckert, [barbara.beckert@drwi.org](mailto:barbara.beckert@drwi.org) 414-292-2724 or Jenny Neugart, [jennifer.neugart@wisconsin.gov](mailto:jennifer.neugart@wisconsin.gov), (608) 266-7707.



# Disability Vote Coalition Survey Results

**The Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition surveyed 314 people with disabilities, older adults and family members to see how the voting bills would impact their ability to vote. The following is a summary of those results.**

## **Absentee Voting**

- 80% of people with disabilities who took the survey voted absentee in the last year.

## **Transportation Barriers**

- Nearly a quarter of people with disabilities have no driver's license (23%).
- A third (32%) rely on someone else to drive them anyplace they need to go
- More than quarter (26%) say transportation is a barrier for them to vote.

*"This will be impossible for my disabled family member to vote as we do not have public transportation and he will likely never have a driver's license."*

*"[Our son] would not be able to vote without us driving him there."*

*"There is limited bus service in this area and NO private cab service."*

## **Assistance with Voting**

- 28% of people with disabilities received assistance during the voting process.
- Nearly **three-quarters** (73%) said they would have difficulty voting if residential staff could no longer assist them with voting.

*"Not everyone living in a residential facility have guardians or family members living in Wisconsin. A lot of guardians live out of state and could not assist with voting."*

*"I probably wouldn't vote."*

## **Absentee Drop Boxes**

- 64% of people with disabilities would have difficulty with voting if there were only one drop box attached to the municipal clerk's permanent office building.

*"It would be even worse than having it at the voting location because a small-town clerk usually works out of their home, which is not a public facility. There's still no transportation, but even if there was, there's no handicapped parking, no accessible entrance, etc. on a private home."*

*"People that drive think it's easy for everyone to get a ride. Not so easy in a wheelchair..."*

## **Indefinitely Confined**

- 85% of people with disabilities said they would have difficulty voting if they had to request a ballot for each election and provide photo ID for indefinitely confined status.
- Nearly 9 in 10 (89%) said they would have difficulty voting if they had to renew their indefinitely confined status every two years.

*"It's difficult to figure out how to add the photo ID to an online request for an absentee ballot."*

*"My daughter doesn't have the technology or knowledge to be able to take a photo of her ID and upload it each time."*

*"Not only would this bill negatively affect my sons with disabilities, but one of my parents is over 80 years old with a chronic medical condition. She does not have a home computer and could not do any online requests or photo scanning. She has limited access to transportation. These kinds of restrictions take autonomy away from voters with disabilities. Legislators should be working with disability advocates to remove barriers to voting, not making it harder to vote!"*



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## **Resource List for Disability Vote Coalition Speaks Out on Voting Bills: June 9, 2021**

*The Americans with Disabilities Act and Other Federal Laws Protecting the Rights of Voters with Disabilities:*

[https://www.ada.gov/ada\\_voting/ada\\_voting\\_ta.htm](https://www.ada.gov/ada_voting/ada_voting_ta.htm)

*Wisconsin Statutes Related to Accessibility*

<https://disabilityvote.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/State-Statutes-Related-to-Accessibility-acc.pdf>

*Disability and Voting Accessibility in the 2020 Elections. Final Report on Survey Results, Rutger's University for the US Election Assistance Committee*

[https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/voters/Disability\\_and\\_voting\\_accessibility\\_in\\_the\\_2020\\_elections\\_final\\_report\\_on\\_survey\\_results.pdf](https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/voters/Disability_and_voting_accessibility_in_the_2020_elections_final_report_on_survey_results.pdf)

*WEC November 2020 Election Data Report*

<https://elections.wi.gov/node/7329>

Includes data on Indefinitely Confined Voters in the 2020 election.

*Getting There is Half the Battle: Wisconsin's Photo ID Law, Access to DMV Services, and the Fight for Our Freedom to Vote, May 2021 Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition, All Voting Is Local, and League of Women Voters of Wisconsin.*

[https://allvotingislocal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/LCCHR\\_AVL\\_report.pdf](https://allvotingislocal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/LCCHR_AVL_report.pdf)

*Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition Voting Rights fact sheet,*  
<https://disabilityvote.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Voting-Rights-Fact-Sheet-1020-acc.pdf>

*Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition Testimony to the Joint Legislative Audit Committee Regarding Proposed Audit.*

<https://disabilityvote.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/WDVC-Testimony-for-the-JL-Audit-Committee-02-11-21-acc.pdf>

*Wisconsin Voter Experiences Shared by Voters with Disabilities and Older Adults,* Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition.

<https://disabilityvote.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Disability-Voter-Experience-4-2021-acc.pdf>

*CMS Memorandum on Compliance with Residents' Rights Requirement related to Nursing Home Residents' Right to Vote,* Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, October 5th 2020:

<https://www.cms.gov/files/document/qso-21-02-nh.pdf>

[\*Assisting Cognitively Impaired Individuals with Voting: A Quick Guide:\*](#)

America Bar Association Commission on Law and Aging and the Penn Memory Center.

*Competency, Guardianship, and Voting in Wisconsin:*

<https://disabilityvote.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Guardianship-and-voting-English-ACC.pdf>

*Covid-19 and the Disability Vote: A Policy Report from the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on voting accessibility with key recommendations to ensure that voters with disabilities have full access to our democracy in 2020 and beyond.* <https://www.aapd.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/COVID-19-and-the-Disability-Vote.pdf>



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## **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 voting. 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.

### **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.

### **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. D. 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 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 Clerk's office to register. Upon registering, they requested Indefinitely Confined voter status right away. J. has always been an indefinitely confined voter.

### **Voter with MS, in her 60's**

K is a mother, wife, and taxpayer. She loved her job but had to stop working over 20 years ago as she was increasingly disabled by MS. She lives at home but is at a nursing home level of care and enrolled in Wisconsin's IRIS program which provides long term care supports in the community. She spends her days in bed and needs assistance with all activities of daily living. Leaving her home to go to an essential medical appointment requires extensive planning and coordination, because of her level of disability, and frailty, and accessibility needs. Leaving her home to visit with family and friends is for the most part an unattainable dream. She has voted as an indefinitely confined voter for ten years and takes pride in being a good citizen and regular voter. Because of her disability, her physical ability to write is very limited. She is not able to complete forms by herself either by hand or on the computer. The proposed requirements for her as an indefinitely confined voters to go somewhere to take an oath, and to see her doctor to have him verify her status would be major barriers. Having to resubmit the request every two years and repeatedly provide a copy of photo ID would also be very difficult.