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**Statement on WEC Report:
Barriers Faced by Elderly Voters and Voters with Disabilities**

This week the Wisconsin Election Commission (WEC) released their report on *Barriers Faced by Elderly Voters and Voters with Disabilities*. The Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition (DVC) thanks the WEC for this report and commends their work with disability groups and with clerks, to address the accessibility of Wisconsin elections.

The report highlights efforts to address accessibility during the pandemic, including promoting the use of curbside voting, expansion of the accessibility supply program, development of new training materials for election workers that incorporate accessibility, accessibility specific training and guidance for clerks, and collaboration with the Accessibility Advisory Committee. The DVC commends the clerks and election workers who have advanced improvements in accessibility, as well as those who have utilized the WEC supplies, trainings, and resources.

Report findings show that while some progress has been made, the work to ensure that all polling places are accessible is far from over. Polling site location choice, accessible parking, and poll worker training are areas that need improvement, as well as funding to expand the accessibility audit program. When the program began, 1,614 audits were conducted during 2011- 2013. Due to reduced funding, the current plan is for only 500 audits to occur during the two-year cycle. With such a significant drop in the number of planned audits, it is difficult to determine if there have been improvements in polling place accessibility. The need for accessible polling places continues to grow, given Wisconsin's aging population. Wisconsin must increase our investment in accessibility monitoring and oversight and increase the number of polling place audits.

Accessible polling places are vital to the participation of Wisconsin voters who have a disability, including disabilities acquired by aging, and are required by federal and state law. To maintain and improve the accessibility of Wisconsin elections, the Disability Vote Coalition asks policymakers to advance the following recommendations:

- **Increase the number of polling place accessibility audits.** Wisconsin has seen a significant reduction in the number of accessibility audits, as federal funding has declined. We recommend development of a plan for a comprehensive statewide assessment of polling places, and allocation of additional funding to fill the gap created by the reduced federal funds. We also hope to see the WEC play a larger role in ensuring there is more consistency as far as accessibility across the state.
- **Expand oversight and enforcement to ensure that curbside voting is uniformly available at every polling place.** While curbside voting is required by Wis Stat 6.82(1)(a), it is not consistently available at Wisconsin polling places and many voters who need this accommodation are not aware of it. In some cases, voters are denied this accommodation. Enforcement and oversight are needed to ensure this accommodation is uniformly available. In addition, awareness of curbside voting should be addressed by including this information in municipal newsletters, websites, and election day signage.
- **Continue and expand the WEC Accessibility Supply program,** which provides cost effective, simple options to address many accessibility issues.
- **Require new poll workers to complete training on core competencies before serving, and a minimum of one training annually,** to ensure poll workers understand voting regulations and voter rights. This requirement could be met by completing the WEC Commission Chief Inspector training, or equivalent training developed by local clerks. Training topics should include voter rights, accessibility, and accommodations for voters with disabilities.
- **Increase the number of poll workers with disabilities** who can bring their lived experience and front-line perspective on accessibility to our polling places.
- **Develop a screen reader accessible, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant absentee ballot** to allow equitable access to absentee voting for voters with blindness, vision, or other disabilities who cannot physically mark the ballot and rely on assistive technology to vote privately and independently. The ballot should be electronically sent to the voter, who can then complete the ballot using appropriate assistive technology, then electronically and securely submit the ballot to the municipal clerk.

- **Update the list of approved equipment that meet the federal requirement to have at least one accessible voting system** for persons with disabilities at each polling place in federal elections. Systems that combine the tabulator with the accessible voting machine do not provide equitable access. Municipalities who use these systems should be required to also purchase a secondary screen which allows the accessibility function to be used independently of the tabulator and provides equitable access for voters with disabilities to vote privately and independently.
- **Expand options for obtaining photo ID for voting.** Recommendations are in the recent report from the Disability Vote Coalition, All Voting Is Local, and LWV of WI, [Getting There is Half the Battle: Wisconsin's Photo ID Law, Access to DMV Services, and the Fight for Our Freedom to Vote.](#) Since so many people with disabilities are non-drivers and do not have a driver's license, lack of access to acceptable voting ID for voting may prevent them from casting a ballot.

Accessibility is not a one-time fix, but requires ongoing training, awareness, oversight, and enforcement. The Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition thanks the Wisconsin Election Commission and Wisconsin clerks for their work to improve accessibility. We stand ready to work with you to improve the accessibility of Wisconsin elections and welcome the opportunity to work together to address barriers and increase access.

The Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition 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.