# GUARDIANSHIP & VOTING: Preserving and Restoring the Right to Vote

September 14, 2022







WISCONSIN BOARD FOR PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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- People First Wisconsin
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- WI Coalition of Independent Living Centers
- WI Guardianship Association
- Wisconsin Guardianship Support Center

## About Disability Rights Wisconsin

- DRW is the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy system for Wisconsin
- DRW helps protect the voting rights of people with disabilities, as required by the Help America Vote Act
- Contact the DRW Voter Hotline for assistance or questions about voting 844-347-8683 / info@disabilityvote.org
- Join the Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition, coordinated by DRW and BPDD: <u>https://disabilityvote.org/</u>

## **Program Logistics**

Please remain muted throughout the session to limit background noise.

Use the chat feature to type your questions.

Sign language interpreters are provided. If you need help accessing the interpreter, put your request in the chat.

Auto-captioning is provided. Click the CC Live transcript button.

Speakers, please say your name before you speak to help with accessibility.

Links to the presentation and resources will be emailed to all who registered for this event, and will be posted on the DRW and Disability Vote Coalition website.

How to Preserve and Restore the Right to Vote

Ellen Henningsen, J.D.

Director, Voting Rights & Guardianship Project at Disability Rights Wisconsin

#### **New Resources**

- Guardianship & Voting: How to Get Your Right to Vote Back: A Summary
  - 4 pages
  - Quick reference
  - Will be available on websites of DRW, DVC and others.
  - Links will be emailed to registrants.

#### GUARDIANSHIP & VOTING: HOW TO GET YOUR RIGHT TO VOTE BACK

A SUMMARY BY DISABILITY RIGHTS WISCONSIN



This guide briefly explains the steps you must take if you have lost your right to vote in a guardianship case and want to get it back. It may be helpful to ask a friend, family member, teacher, or guardian to read this with you. You may also have them help you follow all the steps.

A detailed guide is available on the **Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW)** website at <u>disabilityrightswi.org</u>, or contact the **DRW Voter Hotline** at 844-347-8683 or <u>info@disabilityvote.org</u>.

#### HOW DO I KNOW IF I LOST THE RIGHT TO VOTE?

If a guardian was named by a court to make decisions for you, there will be a written decision. It is called a "Determination and Order on Petition for Guardianship Due to Incompetency." These are your guardianship papers. These papers show if you have the right to vote or if it was taken away.

Look for paragraph 3. A. (3). It looks like this:

#### 

If the box is checked, you cannot vote. Use this guide to help you get your right to vote back.

#### **New Resources**

- Guardianship & Voting: How to Get Your Right to Vote Back
  - Detailed, step-by-step guide
  - ► 19 pages
  - Includes legal forms & instructions
  - Will be available on websites of DRW, DVC and others.
  - Links will be emailed to registrants.



#### GUARDIANSHIP AND VOTING: How to Get Your Right to Vote Back

A Disability Rights Wisconsin Guide

# TOPICS



- Voter Eligibility Basics
- Guardianship Law Basics
- ► How to Keep Your Right to Vote
- How to Get Your Right to Vote Back
  - ▶ if lost in a guardianship case
- How to Convince the Court that You Should Get Your Right to Vote Back

# **Basics of Voter Eligibility**

#### You are eligible to vote if:

- ✓ You are a U.S. Citizen
- ✓ You will be at least 18 years old on or before Election Day
- You have resided at your current address in WI for 28 days prior to the election
  - Must vote at former address if residence at current address is less than 28 days
- You are not currently serving a sentence for a felony conviction.
  - including incarceration, parole, probation, or extended supervision (also known as being "on paper)
- You have not been determined by a court to be ineligible to vote.

## **Basics of Guardianship Law**

Two types of guardians

Guardian of the Person

- Authorized to make specified personal decisions
- Guardian of the Estate
  - Authorized to make specified financial decisions
- Options for court
  - depends on capacity of individual
  - Guardian of the Person and Guardian of the Estate
  - only a Guardian of the Person
  - only a Guardian of the Estate

## **Basics of Guardianship Law**

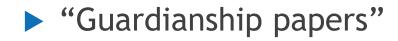
Many people assume guardianship automatically means the individual with a guardian cannot vote.

► That's wrong.

- Rights are retained unless expressly removed.
- What type of guardian was appointed?
  - Guardian of the Estate only?
    - Capacity of individual to make financial decisions.
    - Voting rights can never be removed if only a Guardian of the Estate is appointed.

# **Basics of Guardianship Law**

- Guardian of the Person?
  - Capacity of individual to make personal decisions.
  - What is the scope of the guardianship of the person?
    - What rights has the individual retained?
    - What rights have they lost (not transferred to the guardian)?
    - What rights have been transferred to the guardian?
    - What rights are shared with the guardian?
  - The answer is in the court's "Determination and Order".



- A person under guardianship keeps the right to vote unless a court expressly removes it.
- Only a court can take away your right to vote.
- People who can not take away your right to vote -
  - > guardian
  - > parent/other family member
  - election official
  - > service provider
  - > teacher
  - power of attorney



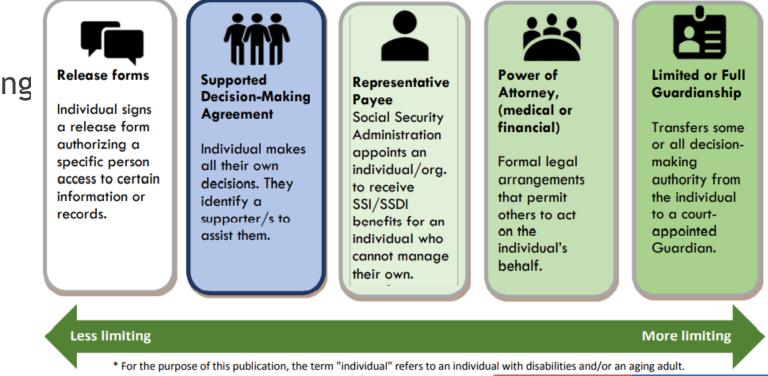
- Your right to vote is at risk in the guardianship process.
  - One of the issues the court considers when appointing a Guardian of the Person.
- You do not control the outcome.
  - The court controls the outcome.
- The court may remove the right to vote even if that is not what the petitioner requested or the individual wants.

▶ To be 100% sure the person does not lose the right to vote -

- b do not file a guardianship petition.
- Consider other options
  - release forms
  - supported decision-making
  - rep payee
  - powers of attorney

rep payee

#### **Current decision-making support tools**



- ▶ If guardianship is the best option
  - try to keep the right to vote.
  - Petitioners should be careful how they describe the individual's abilities and disabilities so as not to jeopardize the right to vote.

To minimize the risk of losing the right to vote In the Petition - don't check the box.

STATE OF WISCONSIN, CIRCUIT C	COURT, COUNTY
IN THE MATTER OF	Petition for
Name	
name	Permanent
Date of Birth	Guardianship Due to Incompetency (Adult Guardianship)
	Case No
I STATE:	
1. I am interested as	

**15.** GUARDIAN OF THE PERSON

I request the appointment of a guardian of the person. If granted, I understand that this may result in a prohibition of the individual's ability to possess firearms pursuant to §54.10(3)(f), Wis. Stats. A. Rights to be removed in full. If removed, these rights may not be exercised by any person.

I request that the court declare the individual has incapacity to exercise the right to

(1) execute a will.

(2) serve on a jury.

(3) register to vote or to vote in an election.

► The court relies on -

- their own judgement
- the Guardian ad Litem (GAL)
- the examining doctor or psychologist
- the petitioner (the person asking to have a guardian appointed)
- Some or all of them may believe that if a person needs a guardian for any reason, they should lose their right to vote.

- Negative reports from the GAL and the doctor/psychologist can influence the court.
- Talk to the Guardian ad Litem about why the individual should keep the right to vote

14. GUARDIAN OF THE PERSON

- A. Rights to be <u>removed</u> in full. If removed, these rights may not be exercised by any person. I recommend that the court declare the individual has incapacity to exercise the following rights to
  - (1) execute a will.
  - (2) serve on a jury.
  - (3) register to vote or to vote in an election.
- Talk to doctor/psychologist about why the individual should keep the right to vote
  - 9. Does the individual have the evaluative capacity to
    - A. execute a will?
    - B. serve on a jury?
    - C. register to vote or vote in an election?

Yes	🗌 No
🗌 Yes	🗌 No
🗌 Yes	🗌 No

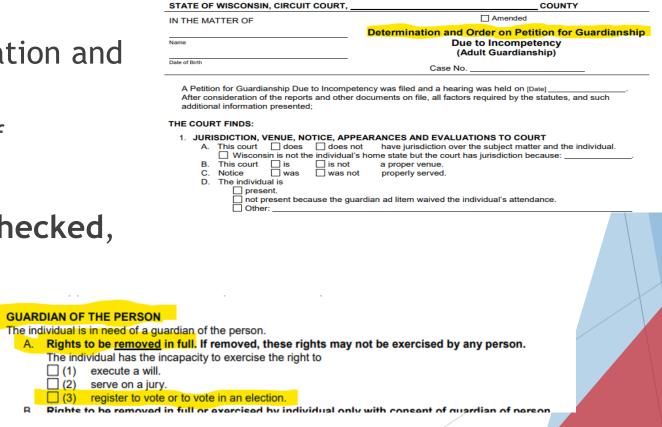
- Consider getting an attorney for the individual.
  - Tell the GAL
- Be prepared to present evidence that the individual should keep their right to vote.
- But remember, petitioner and individual don't control the outcome.
  - The court decides.

The outcome you want is an empty checkbox on this form.

STATE OF WISCONSIN, CIRCUIT COURT,	COUNTY	
IN THE MATTER OF	Amended	_
	Determination and Order on Petition for Guardianshi	<b>3</b>
Name	Due to Incompetency (Adult Guardianship)	
Date of Birth	Case No	
After consideration of the reports and other additional information presented;	etency was filed and a hearing was held on [Date] r documents on file, all factors required by the statutes, and such	
THE COURT FINDS:		
A. This court does does Wisconsin is not the individua B. This court is is is not C. Notice was was n D. The individual is present.	I's home state but the court has jurisdiction because: a proper venue.	
	A. Rights to The individ	IE PERSON need of a guardian of the person. be <u>removed</u> in full. If removed, these rights may not be exercised by any person. ual has the incapacity to exercise the right to recute a will.

- (2) serve on a jury.
- (3) register to vote or to vote in an election
- R Rights to be removed in full or exercised by individual only with consent of quardian of person.
- What needs to be done to convince the court will be discussed later.

- Find out if you lost the right to vote.
  - Look at Determination and Order.
    - Not in Letters of Guardianship
  - If the box is not checked, you can vote.



If the box is checked, you cannot vote.

(3) The individual is unable to prevent financial exploitation.
3. GUARDIAN OF THE PERSON
The individual is in need of a guardian of the person.
A. Rights to be removed in full. If removed, these rights may not be exercised by any person.
The individual has the incapacity to exercise the right to
(1) execute a will.
(2) serve on a jury.
(3) register to vote or to vote in an election.
B Rights to be removed in full or exercised by individual only with consent of quardian of person

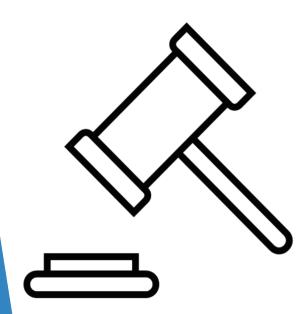
#### You can ask to get your right to vote back.

- How do I start?
- Do I need to get anyone else's okay?
- Can I have someone help me?
- Do I need an attorney?
- What does it cost?
- Who can file the petition?
- Where do I go to start?
- What will happen after I start?



► How Do I Start?

- You must go back to court.
- You must file a form called a Petition with the court.



Do I Need Anyone's Okay?

► No.

- You do not need to ask the county or anyone else to start.
- You decide if you want to ask to get your right to vote back.

- Can Someone Help Me?
  - > Yes.
  - Your guardian, a friend, a family member, a service provider, a teacher can help you.
  - Someone who agrees that you should get your right to vote back.



- Do I Need an Attorney?
  - ► No.
- Easier if you have your own attorney.
- What are my options?

Options -

- can do the whole process on your own.
- can find and pay for your own attorney.
- can start on your own and then get an attorney.
  - If you can't afford it, you can ask court to find and pay for your attorney.
  - There is a place in the Petition.

- What Does it Cost?
  - No cost or fee to file.
- Who can file?
  - > you, your guardian, a friend, a family member, anyone.
  - someone who agrees that you should get your right to vote back.
- Where Do I File?
  - with court that granted the guardianship
    - or the court where it was transferred to



- Start by filling out the Petition.
  - It's easy.
  - Forms & instructions are included in the "how to" guide.
  - Links will be emailed to registrants.
  - Follow the instructions.

STATE OF WISCONSIN, CIRCUIT COU	RT, COUNTY
IN THE MATTER OF THE GUARDIANSHIP OF	Amended Ward's Petition to Restore Ward's Right to Register to Vote and to Vote
Date of Birth	Case No.

#### UNDER OATH, I STATE:

- 1. I am the ward and am 18 years of age or older.
- 2. This is a Petition to have my right to register to vote and to vote restored.

STATE OF WISCONSIN, CIRCUIT COU	RT,	COUNTY
IN THE MATTER OF THE GUARDIANSHIP OF		Amended
Name	Rest	n on Behalf of Ward to ore Ward's Right to er to Vote and to Vote
Date of Birth	Case No	0
UNDER OATH, I STATE:		

- 1. I am \_\_\_\_\_\_ a person acting on the ward's behalf.
- 2. This is a Petition to have the ward's right to register to vote and to vote restored.

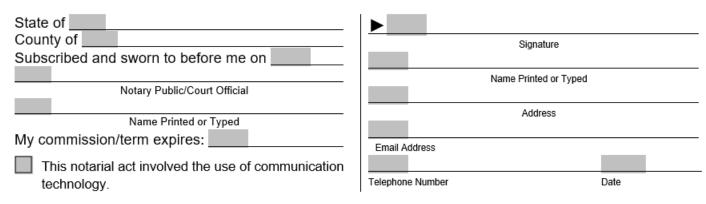
STATE OF WISCONSIN, CIRCUIT COU	RT,C	OUNTY
IN THE MATTER OF THE GUARDIANSHIP OF	Amended	
Name	Ward's Petition to Restore Ward's Right to Register to Vote and to Vote	
Date of Birth	Case No.	_

#### UNDER OATH, I STATE:

- 1. I am the ward and am 18 years of age or older.
- 2. This is a Petition to have my right to register to vote and to vote restored.
- 3. This Petition is filed more than 180 days after any previous hearing on the Petition for Guardianship or Petition for Receipt and Acceptance of a Foreign Guardianship.
- 4. By Order of this Court dated \_\_\_\_\_\_, I was determined to be incompetent and in need of a guardian. My right to register to vote and to vote were removed by that Order.
- 5. I believe I am capable of understanding the objective of the elective process and therefore the guardianship order should be modified and my right to register to vote and to vote should be restored in full.
- 6. I am indigent.

#### I REQUEST THE COURT:

- 1. Order a hearing on this Petition.
- 2. Appoint an attorney to represent me at the county's expense.
  - 3. Designate the persons entitled to notice of hearing and the <u>manner in which</u> notice shall be given.
  - 4. Limit the guardianship of the person and restore my right to register to vote and to vote in all elections.



► Take or mail the Petition to the Register in Probate office

Directory of Wisconsin Probate offices (wripa.org)

- What Happens Next?
  - Notice of Hearing

- Appointment of Guardian ad Litem
- Appointment of an examining doctor or psychologist?
- Hearing
- Decision

#### Notice of Hearing

- The court will tell you when and where the hearing will be. This is called "Notice."
- It is very important that you remember the date and time and place of the hearing.

STATE OF WISCONSIN, CIRCUIT COURT,	COUNTY	
IN THE MATTER OF	Amended _ Amended _ Notice and Order for Hearing Chapters 53, 54 and 55 (Minor and Adult Guardianship)	
Name		
Date of Birth	Case No	
	Notice of Hearing	
Date	Location (Include Room No.)	
Circuit Court Judge/Circuit Court Commissioner/Register in Probate	3	

- The court will want your guardian to be told the date and time and place of the hearing.
- The court may want other people to be told.

#### Appointment of GAL

- The court will appoint a Guardian ad Litem or GAL (pronounced G-A-L)
  - not a guardian
  - an attorney
- ► The GAL is **not** your attorney.
- The GAL decides what she or he thinks is best, even if that is not what you want.
- The GAL tells the court.
- Tell the GAL why you should get your right to vote back.
- Even if the GAL believes that you should not get your right to vote back, you can still tell the court that you should.

Appointment of an examining doctor or psychologist?

- ► Not required.
- Court may want opinion of doctor or psychologist.
- You can have you own doctor or psychologist write a letter of support.

#### ► The Hearing

- ▶ The hearing is the formal meeting at the courthouse.
- This is when you tell the court why you should get your right to vote back.
- You must attend the hearing.
- If you can't get to the courthouse, ask to have the hearing held where you live.
- At the hearing, the court will listen to you, your supporter, and the GAL.

#### The Decision

#### The court will decide whether you will get your right to vote back.

The court's decision will be written in an "Order."

The court's decision will be	STATE OF WISCONSIN, CIRCUIT COURT,	COUNTY
	IN THE MATTER OF THE GUARDIANSHIP OF	Amended
written in an "Order."	Name	Order to Restore Ward's Right to Register to Vote and to Vote
	Date of Birth	Case No.
	A Petition to Restore Ward's Right to Vote was filed on After consideration of the report filed by the Guardian ad liter , and argument;	
	THE COURT FINDS:	
If the court gives you your r also fill out another form ar	•	
DF WISCONSIN CIRCUIT COURT	COUNTY	
atter of		
	Amended	
	Amended of Voting Eligibility	

TO: State of Wisconsin/Wisconsin Elections Commission 212 East Washington Avenue, 3rd Floor

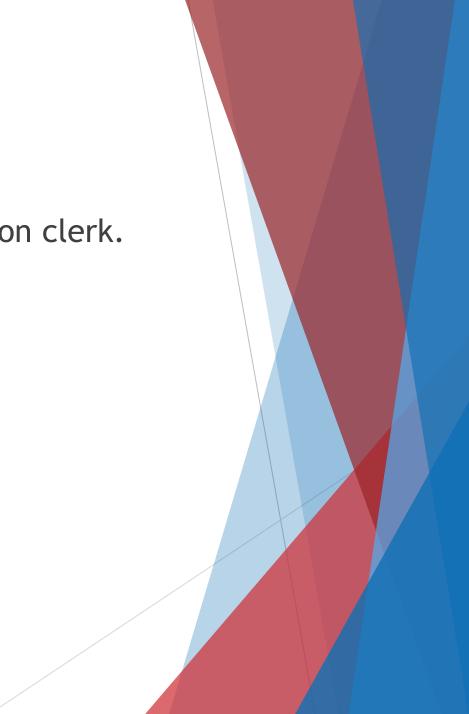
STATE OF WISCONSIN

P.O. Box 7984

In the Matter of

Date of Birth: 11

- Be sure to get a copy of the court's Order.
- ▶ Be sure to get a copy of the form for the election clerk.
- ► If you vote in person, bring copies with you.



- What Is the Court Deciding?
- What Should I Do Before the Hearing?
- What Should I Do at the Hearing?

- What Is the Court Deciding?
  - Do you understand the objective of the elective process?
    - Do you know the purpose of an election?
    - Do you know why we have elections?
    - What is decided by an election?
  - The purpose is to vote for a person (called a candidate) so that the person can win.

- > You need to explain that you know the purpose of an election.
- You need to explain that the purpose is to vote for a candidate so the candidate can win.
- > You do not need to say which candidate you want to vote for.
- You can tell the court that other people do not have to pass any tests or explain anything before they can vote.

How to Convince the Court to Give you Your Right to Vote Back Before the hearing -

- Think about
  - what it means to vote.
  - why you want to vote.
  - what you know about elections.
  - how you decide who to vote for.
- Practice
  - what you want to tell the court.
  - in front of a supporter.

Find someone who agrees that you should be allowed to vote.

- Friend, family member, teacher, aide, caregiver, or your guardian.
- Ask them to come to the hearing and tell the court why you should be allowed to vote.
- Or have them write a letter of support.

- ► At the hearing -
  - Tell the court why you should be allowed to vote.
  - A simple way to explain is to tell the court you want to vote so that the person you vote for can win the election.
  - The person who has come with you should tell the court why you should be allowed to vote.
  - Give the court any letters of support.

- The court will listen to you, your supporters, and the GAL.
- The court will make a decision.
- The decision will be written in an "Order" and a "Notice of Voter Eligibility."
- If you don't get your right to vote back, you can try again in 6 months.

# Resources

DRW Voting Resource Page

https://disabilityrightswi.org/resource-center/voting/

DRW Self-Determination and Guardianship Resource Page
 <u>https://disabilityrightswi.org/resource-center/self-determination-guardianship/</u>

Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition
 <u>https://disabilityvote.org/</u>

New "how to" resource guides mentioned earlier.

# What do I do if I need help or run into a problem?

- DRW Voter Hotline
   844-DIS-VOTE/ 844-347-8683
   info@disabilityvote.org
- Wisconsin Guardianship Support Center
  - For info & assistance on issues related to adult guardianship, protective placement, and advance directives.
  - ► Toll-Free Helpline (855) 409-9410
  - guardian@gwaar.org

# **Time for Your Questions!**



# Panel Members

- Mitch Hagopian
  - Managing Attorney at Disability Rights Wisconsin
- Peter Navis
  - Judicial Court Commissioner, Walworth County
- Polly Shoemaker
  - Wisconsin Guardianship Support Center Attorney

Please type your questions in the Chat