



Board for People with Developmental Disabilities Statement on Voting Bills Hearing Today

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The Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD) has concerns about the impact of AB-599 on Wisconsin citizens with disabilities. The bill on absentee ballots discussed in a hearing today would eliminate the indefinitely confined option and require voters in this category to automatically receive an absentee ballot for every election. The bill also removes the photo exemption for people who are indefinitely confined, creating further barriers for people with disabilities who cannot predict when they can leave their homes, cannot drive, and face obstacles accessing a nearby Department of Motor Vehicles during open hours to obtain a new photo ID.

The bill also creates confusion, saying that voters with disabilities can get help from an "authorized disability advocate" or a licensed caregiver to send a copy of their photo ID to their municipal clerk or upload it to the My Vote WI website. Voters already can request assistance with any part of the voting process and the bill does not clearly identify what an "authorized disability advocate" is or how a voter with a disability would find one. Additionally, it does not address the barriers to obtaining the photo ID in the first place.

Further, this bill imposes a penalty on anyone who makes a mistake. While the intent is to prevent voter fraud, the Wisconsin Election Commission says fraud is "exceedingly rare," based on audits conducted by the WEC after every election. The punitive nature of this bill is concerning to those trying to follow the rules who may unknowingly make a mistake and could discourage voters with disabilities from casting a vote.

BPDD is also concerned with AB-560, which removes the use of drop boxes that was reinstated by the WI Supreme Court last year. Drop boxes are especially helpful for people with disabilities who don't drive and want to deliver their ballots independently. Drop boxes have proven to be a secure and safe way to return absentee ballots.

Voters with disabilities who have concerns can contact their legislators. You can find your legislator at www.legis.wisconsin.gov.