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DRW Calls on Legislators to Protect Voting Rights

On June 22nd, the Wisconsin Assembly will vote on several bills that will make it harder for many people with disabilities and older adults to vote. Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) opposes AB 177, AB 179, AB 192, AB 198, AB 201 because they will create new barriers for many Wisconsinites with disabilities. DRW calls on policymakers to oppose these new barriers and uphold the rights of voters with disabilities.

As the federally mandated protection and advocacy agency for Wisconsin, DRW provides education and assistance to people with disabilities to promote their full participation in the electoral process. During the 2020 elections, DRW provided assistance to hundreds of Wisconsinites with disabilities and older adults, who wanted to safely and lawfully cast a ballot during the pandemic.

"Absentee voting is a lifeline for many people with disabilities, because they experience so many barriers to voting in person, including lack of transportation, mobility restrictions, inaccessible polling places, and difficulty obtaining a state photo ID for voting", stated Barbara Beckert, DRW Milwaukee Office Director. "These bills will create new barriers that may disenfranchise many voters with disabilities, and criminalize some forms of assistance. We want to work with policy makers to protect the rights of voters with disabilities."

While amendments have slightly improved some bills, DRW believes the process must slow down to include stakeholders, and consider recommendations for legislation that will protect the voting rights of people with disabilities and older adults, and address accessibility barriers. A significant number of Wisconsinites have a disability. According to the American Association of People with Disabilities, approximately 23% of the electorate in the November election were individuals with some type of disability, including disabilities acquired through aging.

As policymakers and election officials consider changes to Wisconsin law, it is vital that they safeguard the rights of voters with disabilities, including upholding the protections already enshrined in federal and state law.

Disability Rights Wisconsin is the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy system for the State of Wisconsin, charged with protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities and keeping them free from abuse and neglect.

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