

# ACCESSIBLE ABSENTEE VOTING



Federal law requires that people with disabilities have equitable access to voting, including the right to vote privately and independently.

## BACKGROUND

Currently, Wisconsin does not have an Americans with Disabilities (ADA) compliant absentee ballot. Under Wisconsin statute, absentee ballots may not be transmitted electronically, except to overseas and military voters. Voters who cannot see, read, or physically mark the ballot are unable to vote absentee in a private, secure and independent way. An increasing number of states are providing an accessible absentee ballot option. Wisconsin's failure to do so leaves the state vulnerable to lawsuit.

## ABSENTEE VOTING BARRIERS

**Photo ID:** Wisconsin allows people to vote using a state ID, which must be obtained from the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). However, transportation barriers make it difficult for many individuals to travel to a DMV site.

**Inaccurate ballot-marking:** People who cannot mark their ballot independently have no way to verify how their ballot has been marked by a caregiver.

**Inability to find an assistant:** Many people with disabilities have limited support networks. If the voter lives alone, they may struggle to find a trusted assistant to mark their ballot.

**Disempowerment of the voter:** Inability to vote independently or access an assistant disenfranchises many voters with disabilities.

## IN-PERSON VOTING BARRIERS

While voters with disabilities can vote in person at polls or absentee voting locations, there are barriers that prevent them from doing so:

**Transportation:** Since these voters are primarily non-drivers, they must rely on public transportation, family members or other ways to get to the polls.

**Accessible voting equipment:** While the law requires every polling site to be equipped with accessible machines, the equipment is often not set up and ready to use when the polls open, staff is often not adequately trained to assist people in using it, and at many sites it is not offered to all voters.

## PROPOSED SOLUTION

To ensure that all voters with disabilities are able to vote privately, securely, and independently, Wisconsin needs a ballot that can be sent electronically. The voter can then complete the ballot using appropriate access technology and securely submit the ballot electronically to the municipal clerk.

*"The right to vote privately and independently is a cornerstone of our democracy. There are concrete steps we can take, such as an accessible, electronic absentee ballot, that would make that right a reality for more people with vision loss in Wisconsin."*

**- Denise Jess**

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**WCBlind.org • 800-783-5213**

Info@WCBlind.org