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DRW Disappointed Judge Ignores Barriers for Disabled Voters

Today, a Wisconsin Circuit Court Judge denied our emergency request for a stay of his ruling which prohibits the use of drop boxes and assistance with return of absentee ballots.

Based on DRW's understanding of the ruling, it will be difficult if not impossible for many disabled and elderly Wisconsin voters to return their ballots in the manner they have used for years. "Changing rules about ballot return less than a month before an election will create chaos and confusion," stated Executive Director Lea Kitz.

"The voters we assist cherish their right to vote, but because of disability many must rely on a friend, family member or care provider to place their ballot in the mailbox, in a secure dropbox, or return it to their clerk," stated Barbara Beckert, Milwaukee Office Director. Having the right to request that a person of their choice return their absentee ballot is fundamental to exercising their right to vote.

DRW is deeply concerned that these restrictions will disenfranchise many Wisconsinites. Wisconsin has over 80,000 individuals enrolled in community based long term care programs. Participants qualify for these programs by meeting a nursing home level of care, meaning their support needs are significant and similar to nursing home residents. Health conditions such as Cerebral Palsy, Multiple Sclerosis, Muscular Dystrophy, and ALS may limit their ability to physically place their ballot in their own mailbox, or to travel to their clerk's office to return a ballot.

DRW has already filed an appeal to correct this alarming decision, and remains committed to protecting and defending the voting rights of disabled Wisconsinites and to ensuring our elections are more accessible and inclusive – not more restrictive.

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.