

Date: August 29, 2023

Re: Public Hearing Agenda Item: Meagan Wolfe as Administrator of the Wisconsin Elections Commission

To: Senate Committee on Shared Revenue, Elections and Consumer Protection: Senator Knodl, Chair; Senator Feyen, Vice-Chair, and members of the Committee

Chairman Knodl, Vice-Chair Feyen, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share these comments on behalf of Disability Rights Wisconsin.

Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) 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. DRW is charged with protecting the voting rights of people with disabilities and mandated to help ensure full participation in the electoral process for individuals with disabilities (Help America Vote Act, 42 U.S.C. § 15461 (2002)). DRW staffs a Voter Hotline and provides training and support to assist voters with disabilities and older adults, family members, service providers, and others.

We are pleased to share these comments in support of Administrator Wolfe based on our front-line role working with the Wisconsin Election Commission (WEC) to provide assistance to voters with disabilities and their families, and to other organizations who serve people with disabilities. Under Administrator Wolfe's leadership, the Wisconsin Election Commission has demonstrated a strong commitment to ensuring Wisconsin elections are accessible and inclusive of voters with disabilities, as required by [federal](#) and [state](#) laws.

Accessibility matters to Wisconsin voters. The [CDC](#) estimates that 23% or about 1 in 4 adults in Wisconsin have a disability: 1,055,434 adults. Lack of accessibility can be a significant barrier to casting a ballot.

WEC's important work to improve the accessibility of Wisconsin elections, under Administrator Wolfe's leadership, is addressed in the recent Wisconsin Election Commission report [Barriers Faced by Elderly Voters and Voters with Disabilities](#). Some highlights include:

- In 2022 – 2023, the polling place accessibility review program reviewed 551 polling places in 47 counties. There were 3,062 non-compliant findings, averaging 5.6 per polling place. Disability Rights Wisconsin has been a partner in this program since it began, providing staff time to conduct polling place reviews.

- WEC has developed an Accessibility Supply Program, an innovative and cost-effective way to provide municipal clerks with supplies to address common accessibility problems. These include but are not limited to traffic cones, wireless doorbells, and signs for accessible entrances, parking, and curbside voting.
- Support for Wisconsin’s municipal clerks is a key success factor in addressing accessibility. WEC has prioritized supporting clerks including developing a Polling Place Accessibility Survey for new polling places, and providing clerk webinars and training materials that address accessibility. DRW was pleased to assist with two webinars in 2022, focused on accessible polling place setup and accessible voting equipment.
- WEC has convened an Accessibility Advisory Committee to serve as a resource on accessibility issues. DRW is among the agencies that serve on the committee and provide a front-line perspective on accessibility challenges experienced by voters with disabilities. The committee provides a forum to work collaboratively on developing training and resource materials on accessibility. One example is the “Know Your Rights” video developed by the Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition in partnership with WEC. The video can be viewed here:
[Know Your Rights - w/ Captions \(Wisconsin Elections\) on Vimeo](#)

In addition to the polling place accessibility progress addressed in the report, DRW communicates with Administrator Wolfe and her staff regularly regarding other voting rights and policy questions, including working together to assist disabled voters who have contacted the DRW Voter Hotline. We are fortunate to have timely and helpful responses from WEC staff.

WEC’s work to improve accessibility was nationally recognized in 2022 with a U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) Clearie Award in the category “Improving Accessibility for Voters with Disabilities.”

Disability Rights Wisconsin commends Administrator Wolfe and her staff for their dedicated and effective work to improve the accessibility of Wisconsin elections and to uphold the state and federal laws that protect the rights of voters with disabilities. We strongly support her continued service as Administrator of the Wisconsin Elections Commission.