

For Immediate Release

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Disability Rights Wisconsin Applauds Signing of AB168

Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) commends the signing of AB 168 which addresses a significant barrier to voting for some voters with disabilities. Wisconsin law requires voters to speak their name and address at the polling place before voting. AB 168 will allow voters who cannot state their name and address to have an election official or another individual selected by the voter state the name and address for them.

We thank Governor Evers for aligning Wisconsin law with the protections provided by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Thank you to Representatives Zimmerman, Brostoff, Subek, and Senators Bernier and Schachtner for their leadership on this legislation. We thank every member of the legislature and Governor Evers for joining together to advance this bipartisan legislature. “Most of all, we thank those voters with disabilities who experienced discrimination at their polling place for sharing their experience and calling for a change in the law,” stated Barbara Beckert, DRW Milwaukee Office Director. We also thank the Wisconsin Election Commission for their support and work to train election officials on the new law.

As the federally mandated protection and advocacy agency for Wisconsin, DRW receives funding from the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) to provide education and assistance to individuals with disabilities to promote their full participation in the electoral process. During the November 2018 election, DRW received contacts from deaf voters, other voters with disabilities and family members regarding the barriers to voting they experienced due to current Wisconsin law requiring them to speak their name and address. Some election workers were insistent that these voters speak their name and address and did not seem aware of the need to provide an accommodation as required by the ADA. In one case, a young man who is deaf was told by a poll worker that he would not receive a ballot unless he spoke his name and address. DRW provided advocacy assistance to these voters and worked with legislators and the Wisconsin Election Commission to advance changes to the law.

“Changing the law is only the first step in correcting this discriminatory practice. To ensure voting is truly accessible, it is essential to develop and implement a comprehensive education effort for election officials, poll workers, people with disabilities, and other stakeholders to communicate this change,” said Lea Kitz, DRW Executive Director. DRW is committed to monitoring this change to ensure the voting process is truly accessible to all voters, as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

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 individuals free from abuse and neglect.

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