



Date: July 20, 2022

To: Senator Nass, Representative Neylon, and members of the Joint Committee for Review of Administrative Rules

From: Janet L. Zander, Advocacy & Public Policy Coordinator

Re: **Support for Emergency Rule (EmR) 2209** - relating to: the correction of absentee ballot certificate envelopes (Wisconsin Elections Commission)

The Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources, Inc. (GWAAR) is a nonprofit agency committed to supporting the successful delivery of aging programs and services in our service area consisting of 70 counties (all but Dane and Milwaukee) and 11 tribes in Wisconsin. We are one of three Area Agencies on Aging in Wisconsin. Our mission is to deliver innovative support to lead aging agencies as we work together to promote, protect, and enhance the well-being of older people in Wisconsin. There are over one million adults aged 60 and older residing in our service area.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide written testimony on EmR 2099. As of Feb. 1, 2022, people aged 50 and older make up 55% of Wisconsin's registered voters and people aged 65 and older make up 28% of the state's registered voters.<sup>1</sup> Older adults are one of the fastest-growing demographics in the country. Between 2009 – 2019, Wisconsin's population of persons aged 65 and older grew by over 32%. Over 17% of the state's population is aged 65 and older.<sup>2</sup> Within the older population, a large and growing percentage of people are age 85 and older.<sup>3</sup> With advanced age people are more likely to have multiple chronic illnesses which can make it harder to get around. Age is also a significant risk factor for admission to a nursing home. Roughly 1% of people aged 65-74 live in nursing homes, compared to approximately 15% of people aged 85 and older. Additionally, the American Automobile Association (AAA) reports seniors outlive their ability to drive safely by an average of seven to ten years.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the high priority many older adults place on voting, barriers such as limited mobility, high care needs, lack of transportation, and polling site access issues often stand between their desire to vote and being able to vote. GWAAR urges you to support the Wisconsin Elections Commission's

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<sup>1</sup> Wisconsin Elections Commission. February 1, 2022 Voter Registration Statistics. Retrieved Feb. 5, 2022 from [https://elections.wi.gov/statistics/voter\\_reg/feb2022](https://elections.wi.gov/statistics/voter_reg/feb2022).

<sup>2</sup> Administration for Community Living. 2020 Profile of Older Americans, Publication date May 2021. Retrieved Feb. 5, 2022 from [https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/Profile%20of%20OA/2020ProfileOlderAmericans\\_RevisedFinal.pdf](https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/Profile%20of%20OA/2020ProfileOlderAmericans_RevisedFinal.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Administration for Community Living. Projected Future Growth of Older Population, last modified on May 25, 2021. Retrieved on Feb. 5, 2022 from <https://acl.gov/aging-and-disability-in-america/data-and-research/projected-future-growth-older-population>.

<sup>4</sup> Figueroa IV, D. (2018, August 14). *Seniors outlive their safe driving age by 7 to 10 years, AAA says*. Tampa Bay News. Retrieved February 5, 2022, from [https://www.tampabay.com/news/Seniors-outlive-their-safe-driving-age-by-7-to-10-years-AAA-says\\_170888685/](https://www.tampabay.com/news/Seniors-outlive-their-safe-driving-age-by-7-to-10-years-AAA-says_170888685/).

EmR 2209 and avoid putting any additional barriers in place that will make it harder for the votes of older voters and voters with disabilities of all ages to count. Minor clerical errors are simply technical mistakes which can often easily be corrected on the absentee ballot certificates by election clerks and should not result in a voter's ballot being discounted.

GWAAR supports voting processes that ensure every eligible older adult who wants to vote, can vote, no matter where they live or how they choose to vote. Older voters more heavily utilize absentee voting.<sup>5</sup> To that end, GWAAR recommends the Joint Committee pass EmR 2209 and continue to allow clerks to correct certain minor errors such as adding a missing element of the witness address for a spouse (witness) residing at the same address as the elector. These corrections made by professional, nonpartisan clerks would prevent minor mistakes on the ballot certificate from keeping otherwise valid ballots from being counted.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments on EmR 2209. We appreciate the interest in and efforts of policy makers to preserve, protect, and enhance the voting rights of older adults and people with disabilities. We look forward to continuing to work with you on policies that improve the quality of life of older people in Wisconsin.

**Working together to promote, protect, and enhance  
the well-being of older people in Wisconsin**

Contact:

Janet Zander

Advocacy & Public Policy Coordinator, MPA, CSW

Greater Wisconsin Agency on Aging Resources

[janet.zander@gwaar.org](mailto:janet.zander@gwaar.org)

(715) 677-6723 or (608) 228-7253 (cell)

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Stewart III, MIT. Some Demographics on Voting by Mail, March 20, 2020. Retrieved on Feb. 6, 2022 from <https://electionupdates.caltech.edu/2020/03/20/some-demographics-on-voting-by-mail/>.