

Date: September 26, 2023

Re: DRW comments in Support of SB 39 / AB 38 - Absentee ballot request and return confirmation

To: Chairman Dan Knodl and Members of the Senate Shared Revenue, Elections and Consumer Protection Committee

From: Barbara Beckert, Disability Rights Wisconsin - barbarab@drwi.org

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on behalf of Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) in support of SB 39 / AB 38 - Absentee ballot request and return confirmation.

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 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.

Voters with disabilities and older adults have a higher utilization of absentee voting for a variety of reasons. Many are non-drivers with limited access to transportation. In addition, polling place accessibility issues and/ or disability related, or health concerns may limit their ability to vote in person.

This bill would allow a voter who has submitted an absentee ballot application, to have the option of receiving automatic notification by text message that their ballot application has been received, and that their completed ballot has been received. Voters may choose to continue receiving notifications for all ensuing elections for which they apply for an absentee ballot electronically. The bill also requires that mobile telephone numbers submitted are confidential.

DRW supports this proposal because it will allow voters with disabilities who vote absentee the option of receiving a text message confirming receipt of the ballot request application and the return of their completed ballot. This will provide voters with confirmation security that their ballot request and completed ballot have been received by the clerk. This is an issue of growing concern to voters, given the increasing challenges with USPS delivery and uncertainty about the delivery timeline. As amended, it allows request to be made via My Vote Wisconsin or on the paper application which is used by many people with disabilities and older adults. The bill maintains the confidentiality of mobile phone numbers which is important to voters.

We thank the authors and members of the committee for your consideration of our comments and welcome any follow up questions. Contact information is listed below if we can be of assistance in any way.

Disability Rights Wisconsin

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