



Date: August 30, 2022

To: Wisconsin Elections Commission

Submitted electronically to: electioncomments@wi.gov

Re: Public Comments on the Wisconsin Elections Commission 2023 – 2025 Budget related to Accessibility

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 estimated to be nearly 1.2 million adults aged 60 and older residing in our service area.¹ GWAAR is a member of the Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments regarding the Wisconsin Elections Commission's (WEC) 2023 – 2025 budget; our comments relate specifically to funding for accessibility needs. To ensure the right to vote for all eligible voters, elections must be accessible and inclusive of voters with disabilities. The WEC's accessibility program has four pillars: the polling place accessibility review program, the supply program, the Accessibility Advisory Committee (of which I am a member), and training. To increase the effectiveness and scope of the WEC's accessibility program, GWAAR submits the following recommendations for consideration in the agency's 2023-2025 budget:

Polling Place Accessibility Reviews

To ensure full accessibility of all Wisconsin polling places for older voters and voters with disabilities, additional oversight and accountability is needed. To achieve this, we recommend increasing funding to expand the WEC Polling Place Accessibility Review (Audits) program. Polling place reviews are conducted on Election Day to review various areas of a facility that is serving as a polling place and identify and address any accessibility concerns. These reviews help to ensure that the voting system used at each polling place will permit all individuals with disabilities to vote without the need for assistance and with the same degree of privacy that is accorded to

¹ Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Aging: Demographics in Wisconsin, [County Population Projections Through 2040, P00138A](https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/aging/demographics.htm); retrieved on Aug. 26, 2022 from <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/aging/demographics.htm>.

nondisabled electors voting at the same polling place. Unfortunately, due to the decline in federal funding for this program, fewer polling site reviews occur annually. **Additional state funding is needed to increase the number of polling place reviews occurring during each election and annually.** Additional funding will allow for the hiring of additional limited-term polling site reviewers (so more polling sites can be reviewed each election) and the purchase of additional iPads needed to conduct the reviews.

Accessibility Supply Program

To help clerks address accessibility concerns at their polling places, the WEC implemented an accessibility supply program. Clerks can order accessibility supplies such as signage, signature guides, and cones from the WEC Supply Program, free of charge. Through this program hundreds of accessibility supplies are distributed each year. **This cost-effective program needs additional state funding to expand its scope to include distribution of additional simple options for addressing accessibility issues, and to allow for the purchase and distribution of larger (and more expensive) accessibility supplies such as wireless doorbells for use with curbside voting, lighted magnifying glasses, and even portable ramps.**

We appreciate WEC's efforts to improve the accessibility of all Wisconsin polling places for older voters and voters with disabilities. Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

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