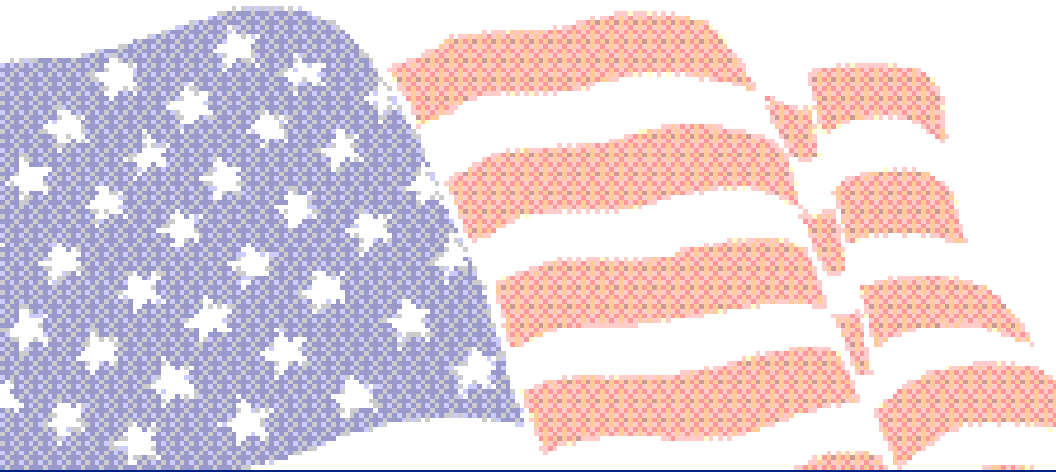


# VOTING IN WISCONSIN



A Guide for Citizens with Disabilities





This booklet was produced in July 2002 by

**Rehabilitation For Wisconsin, Inc.**

in partnership with the

**Wisconsin Coalition of Independent Living Centers**

with financial assistance from the

**Wisconsin Council on Developmental Disabilities.**

*The information in this publication is based on current Wisconsin election laws and is believed to be accurate. Questions on specific interpretations of the law should be referred to the Wisconsin State Elections Board.*

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# VOTING IN WISCONSIN

## A Guide for Citizens with Disabilities



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# WHY VOTE?

Voting is a constitutional right and responsibility of citizenship. It is an important way to help select the national, state and local officials who make laws, design programs and decide how tax dollars are spent.

National elections for President usually get the most attention, but it is usually the people who get elected for state and local positions that have the real power to impact your daily life.

Take time to learn who your elected officials are and how their decisions can affect YOU. You can go on the internet to **www.legis.state.wi.us** and select the button called “*Who are my Legislators?*” to find out who your state and U.S. representatives are. You may also call **1-800-362-9472** or, if you have a hearing impairment, **1-800-228-2115** toll-free.

When you become a part of the election process you can work to elect people who support the issues that matter most to you.



**In 1941 one vote defeated the bill to kill the draft law -- just 3 months before Pearl Harbor.**

# WHO CAN VOTE?

You must be eligible to vote. An eligible person:

- ★ is a **U.S. citizen** on the day of registration.
- ★ is at least **18 years old** on or before election day.
- ★ is a **resident of Wisconsin** and the election district for at least ten days before election day.
- ★ has not lost the right to vote because of a mental disability.\*

*\*A person can lose the right to vote because of a mental disability for two reasons:*

*1. He/she has been judged by a court as incompetent and been appointed a guardian. (Some people lose the right to vote when a guardian is appointed simply because no one thought about letting them keep the right to vote. A person with a guardian can ask the court at any time to restore any right, including the right to vote.)*

*2. He/she has been found by a court to be unable to understand the voting process. Anyone in the municipality where the person lives can ask the court to make this finding. This order only affects a person's voting rights.*

# REGISTERING TO VOTE

In most communities, you must register to vote before you can vote. If you vote at least once every four years and stay in the same voting district, you only have to register one time. Check with your city, town or village clerk's office to find out if voter registration is required in your community.

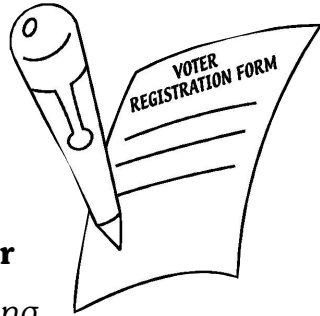
## *Four Ways to Register to Vote*

- 1) Register **at the polls** on election day.
- 2) Register **by mail**. Write or call your city, town or village clerk's office and ask them to send you a Voter Registration Form in the mail. Follow each instruction carefully and mail it back before the deadline.
- 3) Register in person **at your city, town or village clerk's office** until 5 p.m. on the day before the election.
- 4) Register in person **at other designated places in your community**. Check with the municipal clerk's office for other registration sites such as a fire station, public library, community center, Independent Living Center or other agency that provide services to people with disabilities.

## *Information You Need to Register to Vote*

When you register to vote you will need to complete a **Voter Registration Form** and provide the following information:

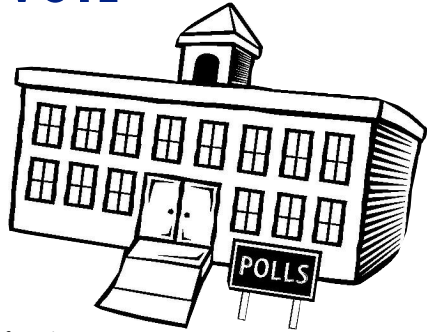
- 1)** Your **full name** (*last, first and middle name*)
- 2)** The **address where you live**
- 3)** The **address where you receive mail** (*if different from the address where you live*)
- 4)** Your **date of birth**
- 5)** Your **telephone number**
- 6)** Your **signature** (*indicating you meet the qualifications to vote*) and the **date** you complete the form. (*If you are unable to complete and sign the form yourself, you must provide the name, address and telephone number for the person assisting you.*)
- 7) Proof you live in the district.**  
Identification you can use would be a Wisconsin driver's license, utility bill, credit card or other identification with your current address. *If you don't have written proof, bring a friend (with identification) who lives in the same voting district. This person can serve as a witness to verify your address.*



# CASTING YOUR VOTE

## *Voting at the Polls*

Locations where you go to vote in person are called polls or polling places. Check with your city, town or village clerk's office to find



out the locations of your polling place and the hours they will be open. In general, polls are open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on election day. Polls may not open until 9 a.m. in some small towns and villages.

Sample ballots and instructions on how to vote are posted at every polling place. They may also be printed in your local newspaper before the election. You may ask for instructions at the polls on how to use a voting machine or how to mark or punch a paper ballot.

## *Assistance in Voting at the Polls*

Any voter who needs help at the polls has a right to assistance. By law, a polling place must be accessible to a person with disabilities. It is a good idea to check the accessibility of the polling place ahead of time. You may find the building not accessible or have trouble getting to the polling location inside the building. If so, you may request in advance, that a poll worker bring a ballot to the

building entrance or bring a friend along to assist you. If your polling place is not accessible, notify your city, town or village clerk's office and the State Elections Board.

You can have help in casting your ballot if you have problems reading or writing, have difficulty with the English language or have a disability which prevents you from being able to mark the ballot or operate the voting machine. Say that you need help when you give your name and address to the poll worker. Anyone you choose can help you, except your employer, an agent of your employer, or (if you belong to a labor union), an agent of your labor union.

Remember, you do not have to vote for every office on the ballot. It is best to vote for an office only if you know about the candidates and their issues.

### ***Taking Time Off Work to Vote***

You may ask your employer for time off your job to vote at the polls. State law says you may take up to three hours off, but you may not get paid for the time. You must ask your employer for time off before election day.

**In 1916 Woodrow Wilson won by less than one vote per precinct in one state.**



# VOTING BY “ABSENTEE”

Registered voters who cannot go to their polling place on election day can vote by **absentee ballot**.

## *Voting in Person*

You may complete an absentee ballot **in person** at your city, town or village clerk’s office. The deadline is 5 p.m. on the day before the election.

## *Voting by Mail*

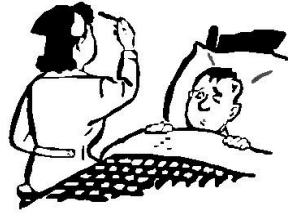
You may also request and vote with an absentee ballot **by mail**. Mail a written request for an absentee ballot to your city, town or village clerk’s office no later than the Friday before election day. It must include:

- 1) Your **full name**
- 2) Your **legal voting address**
- 3) Your **ward or election district**
- 4) Your request for an **absentee ballot**
- 5) The **address where you want the absentee ballot sent**

When you receive your ballot in the mail, follow all instructions carefully and mail it back so that the clerk’s office receives it by election day.

## ***Voting if You Are in the Hospital***

If you are in the hospital, you may choose someone to pick up an absentee ballot from your polling place before 5 p.m. on election day. The



person who picks up the absentee ballot for you must know you, live in the same city or town and show identification.

## ***Voting if You Live in an Institution, Residential Facility or Nursing Home***

If you live in an institution, residential facility or licensed nursing home, you may use this as your legal voting address or you may choose to use your previous address.

Many institutions make plans with their city, town or village clerk's office to provide specific voting times for all registered or qualified voters. These voting times must be held no later than the Monday before election day.

Check with the office of the facility where you live to find out if voting times have been set up. If they have not been set up, you should contact your city, town or village clerk's office and request an absentee ballot. (See previous page on voting by mail.)

# ABOUT ELECTIONS

## *Primary Elections*

Primary elections are held to choose the political party candidates for general or spring elections. The spring primary is held on the third Tuesday in February. The fall primary is held the second Tuesday in September.

## *General Elections*

General Elections are held in even numbered years on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November. In general elections you can vote for:

- ★ **State Assembly** (every 2 years)
- ★ **State Senate** (every 4 years)
- ★ **Governor** (every 4 years)
- ★ **Congress** (every 2 years)
- ★ **U.S. Senate** (every 6 years)
- ★ **President** (every 4 years)

## *Spring Elections*

Spring elections are held on the first Tuesday in April to **elect judges and local municipal, county and education officials**. The presidential primary is also held with the spring election every four years.

## *Special Elections*

Special elections are held to fill vacancies or for other designated purposes.

# MORE VOTING INFORMATION

## *Address Change*

If you move, you must change your voter registration to your new address to be able to vote at your new location. You can make this address change at the polls on election day or call your city, town or village clerk's office and tell them your new address before the election. You must bring your identification with your full name and new address to the polls on election day.

## *Complaints*

If you have complaints about access to voting or believe your voter's rights have been violated you may file a complaint to:

### **State Elections Board**

132 East Wilson Street, Suite 300

P.O. Box 2973

Madison, WI 53701-2973

608-266-8005      608-267-0500 fax

For help with filing a complaint you may contact:

### **Wisconsin Coalition for Advocacy (WCA):**

800-928-8778 Voice/TTY toll-free or

### **Wisconsin Coalition of Independent Living Centers (WCILC):**

608-251-9151 Voice/TTY

800-690-6665 toll-free

# NOTES

Use this page to write down helpful information.

## *Your City, Town or Village Clerk's Office:*

City/Town Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Clerk's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax Number: \_\_\_\_\_

## *Your Polling Place:*

Name of Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

**In 1948 Lyndon Johnson  
became a U.S. Senator by a  
one vote margin.**



**For more information about voting rights and  
the electoral process contact:**

*League of Women Voters of Wisconsin*

**608-256-0827**

122 State St., Suite 405, Madison, WI 53703 - 2500

Fax: 608-256-2853 [www.lwwwi.org](http://www.lwwwi.org)

*Wisconsin State Elections Board*

**608-266-8005**

132 East Wilson St., Suite 300

P.O. Box 2973, Madison, WI 53701-2973

Fax: 608-267-0500 [elections.state.wi.us](http://elections.state.wi.us)

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**For more information on the  
"Wisconsin Citizens with Disabilities Vote!" Project:**

*Wisconsin Council on Developmental Disabilities*

**608-266-7826**

PO Box 7851, Madison, WI 53707-7851

Fax: 608-267-3906 TTY/TDD: 608-266-6660

[www.wcdd.org](http://www.wcdd.org)

*Rehabilitation For Wisconsin, Inc.*

**608-244-5310**

4785 Hayes Rd., Suite 202, Madison, WI 53704

Fax: 608-244-9097 [www.rfw.org](http://www.rfw.org)

*Wisconsin Coalition of Independent Living Centers*

**800-690-6665**

106 East Doty St., Suite 3A, Madison, WI 53703

Voice/TTY: 608-251-9151 Fax: 608-251-9152

