



1-844-DIS-VOTE
www.disabilityvote.org

Date: January 25, 2021

Re: Nomination for EAC Clearie Awards

From: Barbara Beckert on behalf of Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition, coordinator

To: Patrick Leahy, senior advisor - pleahy@eac.gov

On behalf of the Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition (WDVC), we are pleased to nominate staff of the Wisconsin Election Commission for an EAC Clearie Award in recognition of their deep commitment to accessibility and their partnership with the disability community. This effort has been led by Assistant Administrator, Richard Rydecki and Elections Specialist, Brianna Hanson.

The WEC has established an Accessibility Advisory Committee which has cross disability participation. The committee has provided a forum to elevate accessibility concerns and opportunities, and to advance action. WEC staff also regularly participate in meetings of the Wisconsin Disability Coalition to provide updates, solicit input, and address concerns. Here are a few of the collaborative efforts that exemplify this strong partnership:

- The WEC held a webinar for municipal clerks on *Polling Place Set-up* which addressed accessibility. The webinar was co-led by disability advocates from Wisconsin Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired, Disability Rights Wisconsin, and Access to Independence (independent living center), who also contributed to webinar content.
- During the pandemic, the WDVC partnered with WEC staff to develop and disseminate guidance for care facilities (nursing homes and group homes) regarding their role and responsibility to assist residents with voting, in the absence of Special

Voting Deputies. We collaborated with WEC to provide training to educate staff on voter rights and accommodations and provided feedback on WEC materials.

- WEC staff participated in WDVC virtual trainings for people with disabilities and service providers. This included a training for voters who are blind and visually impaired, and a training for our state psychiatric hospital.
- Coalition members provided feedback to WEC staff on the cumbersome process for submitting a complaint to WEC as well as some concerns about response time. In response, WEC staff developed a new online option for to streamline reporting an accessibility concern. They monitored these responses to ensure a speedy response.
- WEC staff and the Disability Vote Coalition collaborated to develop some training videos including videos on *Know Your Rights*, *Online Voter Registration*, and *Consider Becoming a Poll Worker*.
- Prior to the pandemic, WEC coordinated Polling Place Accessibility Audits in coordination with Disability Rights Wisconsin. We are cautiously optimistic that it may be possible to resume these for the April 2021 election, pending the status of COVID and access to the vaccine.
- Wisconsin does not have an ADA complaint screen reader accessible ballot. In the Spring of 2020 WEC staff worked with our coalition leads on this issue to test a screen readers accessible ballot which could be sent via email. Unfortunately, a ruling by the US 7th Circuit Court of Appeals halted these efforts by restricting the option for clerks to email a ballot to a voter.

We commend the dedicated staff at the Wisconsin Election Commission for their commitment to accessible inclusive elections, and stand ready to answer any questions. If you need additional information, please contact Barbara Beckert, barbara.beckert@drwi.org / 414-292-2724.