



Date: February 14, 2012
To: Senator Lazich, Chair and Members of the Committee on Transportation and Elections
From: Disability Rights Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Board on People with Developmental Disabilities and the Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations
Re: SB 386

Dear Senator Lazich, Chair and Members of the Committee on Transportation and Elections,

Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) is the state-designated protection and advocacy agency for people with disabilities. The Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD) was established to advocate on behalf of individuals with developmental disabilities, foster welcoming and inclusive communities, and improve the disability service system. The Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations is made up of over 50 disability organizations across Wisconsin. The Coalition promotes conditions in which all people with disabilities in Wisconsin will receive the supports they need; can choose to live their lives as they wish; and will have the opportunity to be full participants in community life.

We are against the passage of SB 386. Current law requires voter registration in public, private and tribal high schools in Wisconsin. This bill simply eliminates this requirement. BPDD and DRW have been working together over the past 10 years in a non-partisan capacity to educate voters on their rights and responsibilities around voting and to encourage them to participate in the electoral process. Through this work we have established and funded the Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition (<http://www.disabilityvote.org>) where part of our mission is to ensure people with disabilities vote.

There are about 600,000 individuals with disabilities of voting age in Wisconsin and they vote at a rate of between 10-15 percent below that of the general voting population. The reason for this is that historically voters with disabilities have faced barriers to the voting process that decrease participation. We know from our research that youth with disabilities are less likely to have photo identification and also are unaware of the voting process. Our work tries to instill voting as a habit. If voters with disabilities start voting when they are young, they are more likely to continue that habit throughout life. Our current law helps to facilitate this process and while it is beneficial to all high school students, it is even more important for youth with disabilities many of whom have goals relating to integrating into the community as adults after they graduate from high school.

According to the municipal clerks I have spoken to regarding the current law, they do not think that it is a burden to provide this service and feel that it is a benefit to the community and an important part of the work they do. With 2011 Wisconsin Act 23 in place, it is even more important to establish registration and an expert on voting within the high schools.

We do not see there is a reason to eliminate this voter friendly and non-burdensome requirement and therefore strongly urge you to maintain current law.