



WISCONSIN SENATE BILL 324

Project Vote submits this testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 324. Project Vote is a national nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that promotes voting in historically underrepresented communities. Through its research, advocacy, and direct legal services, Project Vote works to ensure that these constituencies are able to fully participate in American civic life by registering and voting.

Senate Bill 324 (hereinafter “SB 324”) would change the availability of absentee in person voting for Wisconsin voters—for the worse. Currently, a voter may apply to the municipal clerk to vote by absentee ballot at any time between the third Monday preceding the election and the close of business on the Friday before the election. This year, for example, the period would run from October 21 through November 1, a total of 12 full days, including two weekend days. Under the proposed amendment, applications in person could only be made during that period on Monday through Friday between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. This year, that would mean only 10 days, with limited hours and no weekend days, and the window would close at 6 pm on November 1, even if the office were open later.

Though “after-hours” or weekend appointments (prior to the weekend before the election) with the clerk would be an option under SB 324, as a practical matter, working people and people of limited means will find it much more difficult and intimidating to avail themselves of this option. Even if a jurisdiction wanted to receive absentee ballot applications beyond this strict schedule—close to the election, when the office is likely to be staffed anyway—it would not have the option to do so under SB 324.

The most obvious question is, why? Like every state that has the option of early and/or absentee voting, Wisconsin has seen the rising popularity of voting in advance of Election Day. Americans’ busy and complicated lives make these alternatives *more* desirable, not less. And since election offices are already well staffed in the weeks prior to Election Day, any fiscal factor owing to accepting applications beyond normal business hours would be trivial at best.

Unfortunately, the only realistic explanation for SB 324 is that Wisconsin legislators are being asked to participate in the lamentable nationwide trend of making it harder to vote, especially for those voters from the most historically marginalized demographic groups. Project Vote urges you to resist this trend and instead work toward *greater* voter participation and *more* opportunities to vote. Your country will thank you for it.

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