



DUEY STROEBEL

STATE SENATOR • 20TH DISTRICT

Testimony on SB 207

April 8, 2021

Good afternoon Chair Bernier and fellow members of the Senate Committee on Elections, Election Process Reform, and Ethics. Last year, out-of-state billionaires attempted to buy and bully their way into election administration in Wisconsin. SB 207 ensures that never again will Wisconsin elections be subject to a massive spending campaign that blurs the line between impartial election administration and partisan political operation.

State law carefully regulates how political campaigns and non-candidate groups spend money advocating for issues, supporting their preferred candidate and engaging in political speech. There is no similar regulation for private funds awarded under contract to government entities responsible for administering and conducting our elections.

Last year, one out-of-state special interest group gave \$6.3 million to just five Wisconsin cities for the ostensible purpose of helping conduct elections in a COVID-19 environment.¹ What we have since learned is that those grants came with significant strings attached. They were not an altruistic blank-check donation. Rather the “contracts” that accompanied the money spelled out specific benchmarks that municipalities had to meet or they would risk losing the money.²

Among the various requirements was a close collaboration with partisan staff employed by a handful of non-profit organizations that advocate for explicit public policy goals.³ In Green Bay, for example, overtly partisan activists employed by out-of-state special interests ran roughshod over a municipal clerk who was doing her best to administer the November 2020 election. According to news reports, that clerk subsequently resigned after Green Bay Mayor Eric Genrich refused to stand up for her and her staff.⁴

Emails released in investigative reports show the political operatives trying to interfere with the review of absentee ballot certificates, control access into a central count facility, establish internet networks and protocols for a central count facility,⁵ and establish procedures for handling and counting ballots.⁶

¹ <https://www.dailysignal.com/2021/03/11/zuckerberg-grant-allowed-outsider-to-infiltrate-presidential-election-in-wisconsin/>

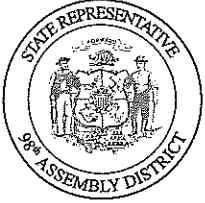
² <https://greenbaywi.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/466>

³ <https://wisconsinspotlight.com/conditional-election-grants/>

⁴ <https://wtaq.com/2021/03/09/state-senator-calls-for-genrich-to-resign-as-questions-brew-over-november-election-handling/>

⁵ <https://wisconsinspotlight.com/emails-green-bays-hidden-election-networks/>

⁶ <https://wisconsinspotlight.com/special-investigation-infiltrating-the-election/>



Adam Neylon

State Representative • 98th Assembly District

DATE: April 8, 2021

TO: Senate Committee on Elections, Election Process Reform and Ethics

FR: Rep. Adam Neylon

RE: Support for Senate Bill 207

Good afternoon Chair Bernier and Members of the committee and thank you for agreeing to hold a hearing on Senate Bill 207.

While the Assembly Committee on Campaign on Elections continues to investigate what happened in Green Bay, it is clear outside election funding created, at the very least, conflicts of interest, questionable conduct, and distrust of the election results in the 3rd most populated city in Wisconsin. You may also be aware that the same group who supplied Green Bay with \$1.6 million, they also supplied \$4.4 million to the cities of Madison, Milwaukee, Kenosha and Racine, for a total of \$6 million for the five largest cities in Wisconsin. This is obviously not a coincidence.

As elected officials we have sworn to uphold our Constitution which includes maintaining integrity of our elections. Therefore, it is our duty to ensure outside groups and their money do not unfairly influence elections in Wisconsin.

To address this issue, SB 207 does the following things:

- Generally, this bill prohibits local clerks and elections boards from applying for or receiving private funds for the purpose of administering Wisconsin elections
- If private funds are unsolicited and received by local election officials, the funds must be transferred to the Wisconsin Elections Commission.
- The Elections Commission is responsible for distributing any funds they receive from outside groups equally on a per-capita basis to all municipal clerks and boards of elections, ensuring fair and impartial access to the funding.
- Require ballot tabulators to take an oath of office like every other election official.
- Prohibit employees of political campaigns from serving as poll workers.

Additionally, Senator Stroebel and I have authored an amendment which does the following:

- AMEND Section 3 (Sub 2) to add language prohibiting any official or agent of a county or municipality from entering into a contract for election administration that dictates the processes and procedures that must be used, contains a provision for recoupment of funds (so-called "clawback" provision) or transfers responsibility for the administration of all or part of an election to any entity not designated by state law as responsible for election administration.
- AMEND Section 3 (Sub 3) to add that the Elections Commission shall not accept any donation or grant of private resources that contains conditions for the funds' use or a provision for the recoupment of funds.

This bill takes crucial steps toward restoring the integrity of our elections and thank you for your time.



Election Commission

Commissioners
Stephanie Findley, Chair
Carmen C. Cabrera
Jess Ripp

Executive Director
Claire Woodall-Vogg

City of Milwaukee Testimony on SB 207

April 8, 2021

Senate Committee on Elections, Election Process Reform and Ethics

Thank you to Senator Bernier and to the committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 207, relating to private resources used for election administration, appointment of election officials and providing a penalty.

The City of Milwaukee opposes SB207, in particular the part of the bill that would restrict a local municipality's ability to apply for private grant funding for election administration.

In 2020, the City of Milwaukee was the recipient of over 3 million dollars in private grant funding from the Center for Tech and Civic Life. I was involved in our funding request from the very beginning and can testify under oath that my administration of elections in 2020 remained completely non-partisan. From the very start, I was asked for my professional opinion of the funding needs of my department in order to ensure that voters maintained access to voting during a global pandemic. Subsequent conversations took place between myself, the former executive director and our Election Commission staff, all of whom were committed to ensuring that we never had a repeat situation like the Spring Election of 2020, where the City of Milwaukee was only able to open five polling places due to a number of factors but ultimately because of a worker shortage of 900 workers for our usual 180 polling locations.

Without these private funds, we would have continued to face a poll worker shortage in Milwaukee. The private grant funding allowed us to pay \$100 additional hazard pay to each of our election workers in 2020 and 2021 – over an \$850,000 expense. Although the City of Milwaukee received CARES Grant federal funding, this money was not allowed to be used for hazard pay except in the case of health care workers interacting directly with COVID-19 patients. Throughout 2020, the City of Milwaukee was the epicenter of COVID-19 cases and deaths in our state. Many workers did not feel it was worth risking their life for their normal \$130 stipend. Increasing the pay by \$100, we were able to recruit younger students and professionals who found it worthwhile to take a day off work in order to be paid an adequate wage and to fulfill their civic duty.

Additionally, we used over 1 million dollars in funding to purchase absentee ballot processing equipment. The purchase of seven additional high-speed tabulators ensured that we had 12 machines operating and were able to process absentee ballots on Election Day by 3:00am on November 4th, a huge accomplishment for a City with nearly 170,000 ballots. For comparison, we finished at 3:00am in 2016 with only 64,000 ballots to process and six leased machines (with a rental cost of \$18,500 per machine). We continue to be able to keep up with Election Day absentee processing demands in 2021 since we now own nine machines and have been able to prepay for ongoing, unbudgeted maintenance costs.

Funds were also spent on non-partisan activities such as purchasing additional PPE and plexiglass (a total cost of nearly \$500,000 for the City of Milwaukee, which was offset by the private funding), security cameras, top-of-the-line secure drop boxes, voter education post cards and social media campaigns, and





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Testimony on Election Integrity Package Senate Committee on Elections, Election Process Reform and Ethics

Thank you Chairwoman Bernier and members of the committee for hearing our testimony today. My name is Kyle Koenen and I am the Policy Director at the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty, a 501(c)(3) law and public policy center based out of Milwaukee. With me is Dr. Will Flanders, our Director of Research. Today, we will be testifying in favor of Senate Bills 207, 208 and 213.

Senate Bill 207

As I am sure you are all aware, the November 2020 election saw a large infusion of private funds to local government coffers through the Center for Technology and Civic Life (CTCL), a non-profit from Chicago that received a \$350 million donation from Facebook founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg.

WILL is in the process of doing an in-depth analysis of these funds and how they were spent, pending response to records requests from a number of municipalities around the state. However, it has been publicly reported that the five largest cities received over \$6 million for the November election. While it has been pointed out that municipalities around the state received these grants, the amounts to other areas pale in comparison to the amounts received by these cities. To date we have received records from approximately 150 communities from around the state, of which 128 are for \$5,000 or less. While some locations like Marathon County received grants that equate to about \$73 per 1,000 residents, others like Green Bay received grants that equate to more than \$10,000 per 1,000 residents.

These disparate funding amounts create disparities in the effect of spending. We have already analyzed whether or not CTCL grants had an impact on the election, and found that turnout was indeed higher in cities that got grants than those that did not after controlling for 2016 turnout and the size of the municipality. On average, turnout increased by 61 votes in areas that got the grants over those that did not. This turnout change was far larger for Democratic voters than it was for Republican voters.

Democrats gained approximately 48 votes in areas that got grants relative to those that didn't. For Republicans, the turnout difference was not significant to the level of statistical significance that is generally required--95%. At the 90% level, Republicans gained approximately 16 votes in municipalities that got grants. Even if we utilize this lower standard for significance, there is a partisan gap on the net.

But this phenomenon ought not only be concerning to Republicans. The prospect of outside organizations coming in and impacting the election result is possible across the political spectrum—from CTCL to more conservative/libertarian groups like the Koch Brothers. Government administration of elections should be impartial and fair, and this bill finds an appropriate middle ground that still allows for clerks to utilize private funds to help with election administration, but in a way that is equitable to every community across the state.

Senate Bill 208

Senate Bill 208 will improve transparency of actions taken by the Wisconsin Elections Commission. As evidenced by this past year, WEC makes a number of consequential decisions at their meetings. These meetings can often run for hours on end and members of the public don't often have the capacity nor desire to spend this amount of time monitoring their government at work. By publishing meeting minutes within 24 hours of the meeting's conclusion, average citizens can more easily monitor the actions of the commission. This is a laudable goal that advances a more open government and should be supported.

Senate Bill 213

Under current law, if a voter believes an election official has violated the law they must first file a complaint with the Wisconsin Election Commission, who then has to dispose of the complaint before the voter can take their case to the courts. Senate Bill 213 includes an important provision that would allow an individual voter to sue directly in the circuit court, ensuring a decision can be made in a timelier manner. These changes are pertinent for a few primary reasons.

First, complaints that are presented to WEC are often on controversial issues where WEC's decision is unlikely to be final and the issue will ultimately be adjudicated by the courts. By design, WEC is not equipped to be a judicial body. With a 3 to 3 partisan split, the commission is unlikely to reach consensus on controversial issues, making the courts a more appropriate venue.

Secondly, a voter may want to file a complaint against an election official who they believe has violated the law. However, such a clerk may be acting on advice that was given to them by WEC. Especially in these instances, it does not seem appropriate to have the agency issue advice, which a local official then acts on, and then turn around and also decide whether or not that advice was lawful.

Lastly, the current requirement is simply a barrier for citizens to have their day in court without delay. If anything, the last year has demonstrated that regardless of where you may align on the legal questions in the various election cases, the need for a timely resolution of election disputes is important to ensuring laws are properly followed, giving voters greater faith in the system.

Thank you for your time today and we would be happy to answer any questions.



City of Madison

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To: Senate Committee on Elections, Election Process Reform and Ethics
From: Mary Bottari, mbottari@cityofmadison.com
Date: April 8, 2021
Re: Senate Bills 207, 210, 213

I am writing on behalf of the City of Madison to raise concerns about the following bills, SB 207, SB 210 and SB 213. These are the first of many bills that will be taken up by the legislature addressing false claims of irregularities in the November 2020 election, claims that were not supported by any state or federal court, including the U.S. Supreme Court.

In the middle of the worst pandemic in modern American history, the Wisconsin State Legislature failed to take any action to aid localities charged with administering elections. Poll workers, with common sense safety concerns, quit by the thousands, and hundreds of polling places needed to be moved to keep residents safe. The state legislature failed to provide extra funding for additional staff needed to deal with these issues and the influx of absentee ballots. The legislature further failed to provide additional postage, PPE, plexiglass barriers, hand sanitizer, drop boxes or any of the provisions needed to keep voters and poll workers safe.

In the absence of legislative action, the City of Madison and over 200 other cities, towns and villages -- including Waukesha and Brookfield -- sought grant funding from a respected non-profit organization to help keep our voters and poll workers safe and to facilitate increased absentee voting. The Center for Tech and Civic Life has a list of these communities on its website. SB 207 would make it a Class I felony for any elections official to accept grant funding. The legislature instead should be appropriating funds to help localities prepare for the next election and allow municipalities to process increases in absentee voting, which are likely to become a permanent feature of Wisconsin elections.

SB 210: This bill would allow election observers to stand 3 feet from the registration and voting tables instead of 3 – 8 feet under current law. This solution in search of a problem. Wisconsin and other states have had problems with over-zealous observers packing into polls, creating disruptions and intimidating voters. Current Wisconsin

April 8, 2021

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law allows election officials to create an appropriate distance based on room and crowd size.

During Madison's 2020 presidential recount, all election observers had close access to ballot processing in the large room secured by the County at the Monona Terrace. The County also secured hanging cameras so any overflow could be accommodated. However, in smaller localities with smaller rooms, three feet of distance may not be attainable and some flexibility is warranted. On a practical level, requiring election inspectors to work with observers stationed 3 feet away is simply onerous and risks interference with, and distractions in, administering the election as well as risking exposure of confidential information that may be requested for registration. For these reasons, flexibility will continue to be needed.

SB 213 would eliminate the requirement that a person wishing to challenge the decision or action of an election official use the WEC's administrative complaint process, opening the door to a flood of frivolous lawsuits by citizen complainants unfamiliar with the law. The WEC's administrative process offers complainants a means of resolving complaints in an expedited manner using the expertise of elections professionals charged with administering elections and training local clerks. Both bring a valuable statewide perspective and consistency to the process.

Moreover, there is ample opportunity for interested and involved parties to bring court actions. During the November 2020 election, the City of Madison was subject to half a dozen unsuccessful lawsuits by attorneys, many from out of state, who were unfamiliar with Wisconsin election law, thereby demonstrating robust access to the courts by concerned parties.

Lastly, since there was no sustained evidence of wrongdoing on the part of election officials, we object to the series of new felony charges contained in these bills applying to Wisconsin's respected clerks and election officials. They are among the heroes of this pandemic, who worked tremendous hours to protect our democracy and voting rights in a time of crisis in a nonpartisan and professional manner.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

From: Kate Houston <kate.who@charter.net>

Sent: Wednesday, April 7, 2021 4:25 PM

To: Sen. Bernier <Sen.Bernier@legis.wisconsin.gov>

Subject: comment for Public Hearing(s) for SB207, SB208, SB210 + SB213

To whom it may concern:

After having read the proposed bills (and the LRB's Analysis for each bill), I'd like to present the following comments for the Public Hearing(s) for **SB207, SB208, SB210 + SB213**. Please note that I was an Ephraim election official for about a decade, from 2004-5 to 2014, and a Chief Inspector for the last 4-5 years of that time, so I have some experience with the conducting of Wisconsin elections, albeit it in a very small village with less than 300 registered voters.

1. **S.B.207** re: private funding of election administration, etc. Actually, I don't oppose **S.B.207**. I don't trust any outside attempts to "assist" the administration of our elections. Instead, the legislature should budget adequate financial support for proper and thorough training of any and all people who are involved in the conduct of elections and for the equipment (optical scanner voting machines, voting booths, etc) that are required.
2. **S.B.208** re: timely publication of WEC minutes. This seems like a reasonable proposal if it's possible to generate the minutes so quickly, especially if the WEC meeting is a long one, and/or goes late into the night. There's no way I could produce minutes that fast!
3. **S.B.210** re: election observers. I most definitely support the option to observe an election, during the voting process and especially after the polls are closed. Watching a poll closing process was the reason I volunteered to become an election worker in the first place. I'd had no idea what actually happens after 8 pm on election day, so wanted to observe the process (and to learn the results as soon as they were in). I also support the signing-in of any election observers; I had to do it during a statewide recount several years ago. It made sense then and does so today.

What I don't support is the reduction of the distance any observers must maintain from the election workers. "Not more than three feet..." is simply too close! Conducting the closing of an election is stressful enough when there are NO observers, because everyone wants to get the paperwork right, wants the machine's ballot count to match the hand count, wants all the extra details covered accurately and as quickly as possible. (Thank heavens the results are no longer sent to the County via dial-up modem!) Having any observers hovering no more than 3 feet away, especially ones who challenge EVERYTHING, is a terrible idea and would NOT make the elections more secure. Furthermore, this language from the LRB's Analysis seems erroneous [emphasis is mine —kh]: "...the bill expands the observation area required under current law so that it is not more than three feet from the table where voters announce their name and address and not more than three feet from the table where individuals are registered to vote." That's not an expansion of the current prescribed observation area [between 3' and 8' from tables], it's a major reduction, to 3' or less! That's too close!

Keep the original text; restore the stricken text below and delete the underlined text below:

Section 1. 7.41 (2) of the statutes is amended to read:

2 7.41 (2) ... The observation areas shall be not less more than 3 feet from ~~nor more than 8 feet~~ from the table at which electors announce their name and address to be issued a voter number at the polling place, office, or alternate site and not less more than 3 feet from ~~nor more than 8 feet from~~ the table at which a person may register to vote at the polling place, office, or alternate site.

To summarize: Allow election observers, **YES**. Maximum distance between observers and election officials = 3 feet, **NO!** Three feet should be the **MINIMUM** distance between observers and election workers. I'd extend that minimum distance between observer(s) and election officials to not closer than four feet.

4. **S.B.213**, re: actions for violations of election laws. This is a HORRIBLE bill! It must have been proposed by desperate attorneys who need fees! And motel owners who'll collect revenue from changes of venue! (This part — change of venue — doesn't bother me...) Furthermore, to allow any person who objects to any action of any election official to "commence an action or proceeding to test the validity of any decision, action, or failure to act on the part of any election official without first filing a complaint" is beyond absurd! No, no, NO, do not pass **S.B.213**. Not now, not ever!

Keep the current law intact; restore the stricken text below and delete the underlined text below:

Section 1. 5.06 (2) of the statutes is amended to read:

5.06 (2) ~~No~~ Any person who is authorized to file a complaint under sub. (1) ~~other than the attorney general or a district attorney~~, may commence an action or

proceeding to test the validity of any decision, action or failure to act on the part of any election official with respect to any matter specified in sub. (1) without first filing a complaint under sub. (1), ~~nor prior to disposition of the complaint by the commission. A complaint is deemed disposed of if the commission fails to transmit an acknowledgment of receipt of the complaint within 5 business days from the date of its receipt or if the commission concludes its investigation without a formal decision.~~

Throw proposed **S.B.213** in the nearest waste basket! It doesn't belong anywhere else.

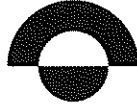
Finally, while reviewing my election official's training materials, I found this excerpt that I'd saved from the Wisconsin Constitution, Art. III, Section 1:

"... The Wisconsin Constitution vests and warrants the right [to vote —kh] at the time of election. Every one having the constitutional qualifications then, may go to the polls, vested with this franchise, of which no statutory condition precedent can deprive him, because the constitution makes him, by force of his present qualifications, a qualified voter at such election."
The Right to Vote - *Wood v. Baker*, 38 Wis.71: (August 1875)

That excerpt sums up my thoughts nicely. Please enter my comments in the public record.

Most sincerely,

Kate Houston
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**Wisconsin
Conservation
Voters**

Testimony on SB 207 & SB 210

Anjali Bhasin, Civic Engagement Director

April 8, 2021

Good morning. Thank you Chairwoman Bernier and members of the committee for allowing me to testify today. My name is Anjali Bhasin. I am the Civic Engagement Director for Wisconsin Conservation Voters. We have offices in Madison, Milwaukee, Eau Claire, and Green Bay, where we work with our network of over 40,000 members and supporters to engage voters to protect our environment. We work in close partnership with many democracy groups around the state.

As an American, few things are more important than right to vote and ensuring all people, regardless of their race, gender, or zip code, have the opportunity to vote. It is fundamental that Wisconsinites should have opportunity to make their voices heard and be able to participate in elections.

Unfortunately, SB 207 and SB 210 create barriers for voters. We urge you to oppose Senate Bill 207 and SB 210.

SB 207

We are concerned about the impact of Senate Bill 207 on municipal clerk's ability to administer their elections and particularly about the restrictions on poll worker recruitment. As we have seen over the course of the last year, poll workers are essential to the operation of polling places and making voting accessible. Without poll workers, citizens often face a reduction on polling locations and long lines. Additionally, according the Brennan Center for Justice longer wait times at the polls often disproportionately impact Black and brown communities.

We are also concerned about the undue burden that these restrictions place on local municipal clerks as they try to administer the elections. On October 16, 2020, just two weeks before the November General election, 51 Wisconsin municipalities still needed poll workers. Even in our most recent April 6 election, we know of at least two municipalities that were still searching for poll workers two weeks before the elections.

SB 210

We urge committee members to oppose SB 210. We are concerned that by reducing the observation area to be no more than three feet away from where voters register to vote or sign in to vote it will create an environment of harassment or intimidation. On election day, there are often anywhere from 1 to 3 observers at a polling location. According to SB 210, the three observers would all have to be within 3 feet of the sign in or voter registration table. Three feet is a small distance and that many individuals concentrated near a voter could create an environment of intimidation for voters.

Additionally, when registering to vote, individuals are often sharing personal information which could include their driver's license number, personal banking information or other sensitive information. Voters deserve to have privacy when sharing this information with election workers. Wisconsinites deserve privacy when casting their votes and to be able to vote in an environment free of harassment.

We urge members of the committee to oppose SB 207 & SB 210 as they create unnecessary barriers to voting in Wisconsin. Thank you.

For more information, contact Anjali Bhasin at anjali@conservationvoices.org or 608-469-4179.



Testimony of Matt Rothschild
Executive Director, Wisconsin Democracy Campaign
To the Wisconsin Senate
Committee on Elections, Elections Process Reform, and Ethics
April 8, 2021

Re: In opposition to SB 207, SB 210, and SB 213

Chair Bernier, and other distinguished members of the Committee.

I'm Matt Rothschild, the executive director of the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign.

Now in our 26th year, the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign tracks and exposes the money in Wisconsin politics and advocates for a full range of pro-democracy reforms so that we have a democracy where everyone has an equal voice.

I'm testifying today to oppose SB 207, SB 210, and SB 213, and I'll get into the details in just a bit.

But before I do that, I want to take just a minute to discuss the context in which these bills, and a raft of others, are circulating.

Let me be blunt: There is an effort under way, here in Wisconsin and around the country, to continue to cast doubt on the validity of the Nov. 3 election, the legitimacy of the Biden presidency, and the integrity of our elections.

In part, this is an effort to retroactively substantiate the bogus claims, repeated ad nauseam, by Donald Trump.

In part, it is an effort to feed the Republican base red meat, and on Jan. 6th, we saw how a segment of that base reacts when fed that unhealthy diet.

And in part, it is an effort to erect barriers that interfere with the freedom to vote in an attempt to gain partisan advantage.

That is why we are seeing, in 43 states including Wisconsin, bills introduced that would interfere with the freedom to vote, the most basic freedom in our democracy.

This effort is toxic to our democracy.

Now, let me briefly discuss the particular problems we have with SB 207, SB 210, and SB 213.

SB 207 would impair the ability of clerks to find sufficient poll workers to conduct a smooth election. The bill prohibits an employee of an “issue advocacy” group from acting as poll worker, and it doesn’t define the term, “issue advocacy” group, either. Does this mean that no one who works for the League of Women Voters or the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign or the ACLU can act as a poll worker? As it is now, clerks have a hard enough time finding enough poll workers. This prohibition would make matters worse.

SB 210 requires election administrators to allow observers to be no more than three feet away from where voters are registering or voting. This may present logistical problems for clerks, may jeopardize poll worker safety, and may increase the possibility of voter intimidation.

SB 213 invites endless harassment of our election officials and endless litigation, and it would allow venue shopping in the courts to seek a favorable outcome. If any citizen can file a claim against any election official, you’re going to gum up our elections as never before, entangling them in legal thickets. And by allowing venue shopping, you would risk raising the suspicion that the fix was in. One additional consequence would be that you would be making it more difficult than ever to find people willing to be an election official.

For these reasons, the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign opposes SB 207, SB 210, and SB 213. Thank you for considering our views.

To: Senator Bernier, Chair, and members of the Senate Committee on Elections, Election Process Reform, and Ethics

From: Barbara Beckert, Director of External Advocacy and Milwaukee Office Director

Date: April 8, 2021

Re: Testimony regarding SB 207/ AB 173

Chair Bernier and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share these comments with you. Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) is the designated Protection and Advocacy system for Wisconsinites with disabilities. DRW is charged with protecting and enforcing the legal rights of individuals with disabilities, investigating systemic abuse and neglect, and ensuring access to supports and services. DRW provides education, training, and assistance to individuals with disabilities to promote their full participation in the electoral process, including registering to vote, casting a vote, and accessing polling places.

DRW is concerned that SB 207/ AB 173 may significantly restrict the number of poll workers. Wisconsin has experienced a shortage of poll workers, and this shortage is growing given that many experienced poll workers are aging. DRW and our partners in the Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition have worked to recruit more poll workers from the disability community, including people with disabilities and disability advocates. Our goal is to improve the accessibility and inclusiveness of Wisconsin polling places and increase awareness of disability related accommodations. SB 207 would prohibit appointment of any poll worker who is a member of an issue advocacy group. We are concerned this would disqualify many individuals from the disability community who want to do their civic duty by serving as poll workers. It would also have a harmful impact on our municipalities who are in need of community members to serve in this important role.

SB207 would also prohibit municipalities from applying for or accepting donations or grant moneys for purposes of election administration. We are uncertain of the scope of this prohibition and it does raise some potential concerns. In our experience conducting accessibility audits of Wisconsin polling places, we have seen many barriers including lack of ADA accessible entrances, pathways, and parking; and lack of curbside voting. Some municipalities have used donations and grant funding to address accessibility and curbside voting. We are concerned that these efforts could be restricted and deter much needed accessibility improvements. In addition, during the pandemic, grant funding helping to address health and safety concerns at polling places. Many people with disabilities have a high vulnerability to COVID 19 and are at risk of major complications. We heard positive comments from some people with disabilities, families, and agencies about the safety precautions taken using grant funding.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments regarding the impact of SB 207.