

**TESTIMONY OF NEIL ALBRECHT,  
CITY OF MILWAUKEE ELECTION COMMISSION  
TO THE COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION HEARING  
SEPTEMBER 25, 2008**

**Good afternoon members of the Committee on House Administration. My name is Neil Albrecht. I am a lifelong resident of the State of Wisconsin and, since 2005, have been the Deputy Director to the City of Milwaukee Election Commission.**

**Thank you for this opportunity to speak today on the important issue of ensuring the rights of college students to vote. Wisconsin experienced the second highest voter turn out during the 2004 Presidential Election. The demographics of those voting represented the vast diversity of Milwaukee residents, including tremendous participation by student voters attending local colleges and universities.**

**I firmly believe the success of Wisconsin in maintaining and inspiring voter participation is rooted in the state laws which recognize the barriers that can prevent an individual from exercising their constitutional right to vote. These barriers can be particularly profound for people in low socio-economic classes, seniors, and for students.**

**For students, the most significant barriers include:**

- Identification requirements: producing an identification document that includes the student's name and Wisconsin residential address for voter registration purposes. This can be particularly challenging for students that are from out-of-state but are residing in Wisconsin for purposes of attending school. Many of these students live in campus housing and most college and university IDs do not include residential address information. Additionally, students living in roommate housing situations may not appear on leases, utility bills or on other documents often used to meet proof of residence requirements.**
- The challenge of completing the voter registration process prior to an election given complex schedules, the proximity of the election of the start of a semester, and an obvious focus on academics.**
- A lack of easily accessible information relating to a state's voter qualification laws and the voter registration process.**
- Lastly, as laws vary from state to state, there is often confusion and/or the dissemination of incorrect information regarding registration requirements, absentee ballots and voting requirements. Misinformation is particularly problematic when it relates to tax filings and declaring residency for voting purposes.**

**Wisconsin's election laws and rules clearly recognize these barriers and include provisions that allow and even encourage students, many of them first-time voters, to participate in the democratic process.**

**Most notably:**

- Wisconsin allows Election Day registration. During Wisconsin's last gubernatorial election, over 90% of the voter's at a polling place near Marquette University registered to vote on the day of an election.
- Since 1980, colleges and universities in Wisconsin may provide municipalities with lists of students residing in campus housing ten days or less before an election. These lists are distributed to the appropriate voting sites and those students appearing on these lists may use their student ID cards, without an address, as proof of residence. The success of this single provision in Milwaukee has been profound. In fact, prior to coming today, I spoke to John Wirth, the Chief election judge at Milwaukee's UW-Milwaukee campus voting site. Nearly 3,500 voters reside in UW-Milwaukee campus housing. He estimated that as many as half of these voters rely on the student list in order to meet the proof of residence identification requirement.
- Corroborating witness  
Wisconsin law also allows a voter to appear at a voting site with a corroborating witness. A corroborating witness may certify the name and address of another voter by signing their registration application and providing a proof of residence demonstrating their own residency in the City of Milwaukee. The opportunity to appear at a voting site with a corroborating witness has proven particularly helpful to students residing in housing with roommates where the lease or utilities are listed in only one person's name.
- Easy access to voting information.  
It is essential to recognize the importance of technology when discussing student participation in elections. The Milwaukee Election Commission posts on the City's website comprehensive and consistent information as well as all forms necessary to register to vote, request an absentee ballot, and serve as an election worker. Links have been established with many if not all of the local colleges and universities. An exceptional example of this service is Marquette University, which developed a web page of information and links specific to the upcoming Presidential election.

**In addition to these key provisions, the City of Milwaukee:**

- Assigns additional staff at voting sites near colleges and universities to reduce long waits. While each and every voter can be challenged by election day lines, students are often placed in a position of choosing between waiting to vote and missing a class.

**The opportunity to vote in an election is important to all qualified electors and equally important to the principle of democracy. I believe this opportunity, free from intentional and unintentional barriers, is particularly important to students as first-time voters. A problematic or disillusioning first-time voting experience can shape an individual's voting participation in all future elections.**

**I am hopeful that this information provides an insight into the important steps congress, a state or a municipality can take to encourage student voting.**