

American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin
207 East Buffalo Street, Suite 325
Milwaukee, WI 53202-5774

July 12, 2004

Ms. Lisa Artison
Executive Director
City of Milwaukee Election Commission
City Hall, Room 501
200 E. Wells St.
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Via Fax: (414) 286-8445

Dear Ms. Artison:

Congratulations on your appointment to serve as the Executive Director of the City of Milwaukee Election Commission.

I'm sure you'll agree that the right to a meaningful franchise, along with free speech and access to government information, is vital in a democracy. A meaningful franchise depends on making it possible for citizens to exercise their right to vote without undue inconvenience, confusion or intimidation while maintaining the integrity of the voting process.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin, which Wisconsinites founded in 1930, has made the protection of the right to vote a priority. We have litigated several claims of voting rights violations over the years. As the fall 2004 elections approach I'd like to call your attention to two issues that deserve the Commission's attention and resources.

In Wisconsin in the past citizens have had problems registering at the polls and voting or casting absentee ballots, if they reside at a non-traditional address, for example, a homeless shelter, training school, or correctional facility. As long as these individuals are otherwise eligible to vote, they should not be denied the right to register and vote at a polling place or by absentee ballot because of their place of residence. I encourage the Commission to work with advocates for the homeless and the institutionalized to facilitate voting as well as to provide adequate resources to train poll workers about this concern.

In Wisconsin individuals who have been convicted of a felony and have served their

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time, including parole or probation, are eligible to vote. Because of the disproportionately high incarceration rates for citizens of color in our state, any confusion whether created by lack of training of poll workers or by intimidation by poll observers, is likely to violate the rights of minority voters. I encourage the Commission to provide adequate resources to inform the public and to train poll workers on the rights of ex-felons.

In addition to the two concerns mentioned above there are any number of problems, such as machine malfunction or obstacles to access for citizens with disabilities, that may disenfranchise Milwaukee voters. Given the importance of the right to vote and the great interest in the fall elections, on behalf of the ACLU of Wisconsin, I urge you to secure the resources you need to educate the public and poll workers properly. Not providing adequate resources now will only exacerbate the potential for violations of voters' rights later.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely yours,

Christopher Ahmuty
Executive Director

cc: Mayor Tom Barrett
Ald. Willie Hines, Council President