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SB 324 shows state lawmakers are out of touch, hypocritical

Joint statement of Alderwoman Milele A. Coggs and Alderman Willie C. Wade

Voting is one of the most important, fundamental rights that we and millions of Americans hold dear. We believe that attempts to suppress, limit or infringe upon our basic and sacred right (and duty) to vote are abhorrent and ridiculous.

Our view of SB 324 – the proposed change to state law that would scale back the hours available to Milwaukee residents (and hundreds of thousands of other state residents) to cast their ballot during non-work day hours – is shameful and hypocritical.

Yes, it is indeed hypocritical for lawmakers to intentionally create roadblocks in the system through which they and all other elected officials have been voted into office, and from which they have benefited. Sadly, it is obvious that they are trying to affect the outcomes of the upcoming fall state elections by creating laws to fix or alter the outcomes of their own elections (including the Governor's race). Such self-serving actions should not be allowed.

Ingrained within the democratic process is a system built with fairness and inclusion in mind. SB 324 represents a fix to a non-existent problem that promises to create greater obstacles for voter access, and which also promotes exclusion in a state that has historically been heralded for its high levels of voter turnout.

Current state law allows just one location for in-person absentee voting per municipality – that is why we see lines outside the Zeidler Municipal Building during early voting hours. The limitation of one site per municipality, regardless of size, and the recent further restriction and limitation to the hours of operations, places a cap on the capacity of large municipalities like Milwaukee and Madison to respond to the increased public interest in voting early and the unique needs of residents in urban areas.

As a result of the proposed restriction to hours, the percentage of in-person absentee voters in large municipalities like Milwaukee and Madison will likely decrease, while the percentages of other smaller municipalities, not affected by the cap on capacity, will continue to increase.

In addition, we have been informed by the Election Commission that the proportion of in-person absentee voters is among the highest in the 6th and 7th Aldermanic Districts—our respective districts—as compared to the rest of the city. If the change is approved, it will have a disproportionate, negative impact on voters in the 6th and 7th Districts.

We urge the Assembly to reject SB 324, and we urge citizens to contact their Assembly representatives and the Governor to tell them to reject this unfair, hypocritical and ridiculous legislation. Above all else, no matter what barriers are put between Milwaukeeans and their sacred rights, we urge residents to get out and VOTE at every opportunity.