

Disability Rights Nebraska

Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities

**Testimony on LB 675
Before the Government, Military and Veterans Committee
Nebraska Legislature
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Good afternoon Senator Brewer and members of the Committee. For the record, my name is Brad B-R-A-D Meurrens M-E-U-R-R-E-N-S and I am the Public Policy Director with Disability Rights Nebraska, the designated Protection and Advocacy organization for persons with disabilities in Nebraska. I am here today in support of LB 675.

We thank Senator Day for introducing LB 675 as it is the most comprehensive and accessible implementation of Voter ID, especially for voters with disabilities or other functional needs.

People with disabilities comprise almost 13% of our state's population—just shy of 250,000 people—and there are Nebraskans with disabilities in every county¹.

The need for a broader list of identification is particularly important for persons with disabilities. There are voters with disabilities who lack a driver's license or state identification card for various reasons:

- Voters who live in a nursing home or a facility that provides their transportation needs
- Voters with a disability who don't drive or who have blindness or low vision
- Voters with disabilities often live in poverty and may not have the resources to own a vehicle or pay for a ride

More restrictive definitions of valid ID disenfranchise people with disabilities. For people with disabilities it is not as easy to get a driver's license or state identification card as one might assume. The exact same offices that provide the documents to register, acquire ID, or vote are often physically inaccessible for people with disabilities-- ultimately extinguishing the ability to exercise their Constitutional rights.

Last year, Disability Rights Nebraska conducted an in-person survey of the Election Commission and DMV offices in over twenty counties. We checked to see whether a voter with disabilities could easily access those public spaces to register to vote, to cast an early vote, or to obtain a photo ID.

Unfortunately, our survey of these public offices revealed that many election offices and DMV satellite locations have significant barriers for people with disabilities, eliminating their ability to obtain a valid photo ID. At that point, it is moot if a birth certificate and the valid photo ID itself are free.

Inaccessibility is an issue affecting counties statewide: rural and urban, large and small. For example:

- Some counties had installed an elevator to allow voters to access DMV and election offices on an upper floor, but the elevator was out of order or required a key to use.

¹ Paul, S., Rogers, S., Bach, S., & Houtenville, A.J. (2023). Annual Disability Statistics Compendium: 2023. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, Institute on Disability. Annual Disability Statistics Compendium: 2023 | Disability Statistics & Demographics, available at www.disabilitycompendium.org

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- Some counties had no signage explaining where accessible entrances were for Nebraskans with disabilities or where disability parking spots were.
- Some counties had disability parking spaces for vans, but they were all the way around the building from the only accessible entrance.
- Some counties had broken concrete all along the route to enter the building. Broken concrete is a minefield for someone using a wheelchair, walker, or crutches.
- Many counties had doorways that were too narrow. A narrow doorway may prevent a wheelchair user from being able to enter and is out of compliance with requirements of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Many counties had automated doors that were out of order. Some doors were too heavy to open manually by a person with a disability.
- Many counties had a high lip on the door threshold, creating a dangerous trip hazard for someone using a walker or crutches and a physical barrier for a person using a wheelchair.

We have produced a short YouTube video² demonstrating some of these (and other) unforeseen accessibility issues people with disabilities currently face when voting. Compliance with ADA standards isn't just a list of bureaucratic requirements in a vacuum: the precise measurements contained in that law are designed to ensure access for all of us.

As one life-long Nebraskan who uses a motorized wheelchair told us as she took us on a tour of the route she takes to vote:

“Among the most common issues I have found is the parking areas. If they're covered with crushed rock, it's very unforgiving for a person in a wheelchair. It becomes very unsafe and you tend to get stuck. That means in the heat of the summer, I would have to wait until someone could come push me out, or in the middle of winter, I would be freezing while waiting for someone to come rescue me. Crushed rock and uneven pavement is a problem for people who use canes or walkers too. They might slip, they might fall, so it's not only the disabled population, but the older aged population that would see this as a concern. The next most common barrier that we've experienced at many places is inaccessible doors. I'm sitting down in my wheelchair, and I have limited use of my hands. When the doors are heavy and have the wrong style of doorknob, I'm not able to open them. They're just way beyond what I'm capable of doing. Also, I've seen many public places where the threshold of the doorway has a lip on the bottom that is too high and impossible for me to get my wheelchair over. Voting means everything to this democracy. We want to participate—we just need the barriers removed.”

This committee should advance LB 675.

² “It's Not Just Red Tape: 7 Things to Notice When You Go To Vote”, Disability Rights Nebraska, accessible at <https://youtu.be/S2JdWmGwpvI>