

Disability Rights Nebraska

Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities

March 25, 2019

Dear Senator Brewer:

Disability Rights Nebraska is the designated Protection and Advocacy organization for people with disabilities in Nebraska. Under the auspices of the federal Protection and Advocacy for Voting Access legislation, Disability Rights Nebraska works to educate individuals and institutions about the voting rights of people with disabilities and the voting process, as well as to ensure that Nebraskans with disabilities have access to exercise their fundamental right to vote. We support LB 163.

There may be value in mail-only elections: they are less costly, increase voter turnout, and provide greater access for many people with disabilities who have difficulty getting to their polling place or who encounter other barriers when casting their vote under the current system. However, relying on mailed paper ballots as the sole means to vote replicates a barrier for people who are blind, have vision impairments, or who cannot physically mark a paper ballot. As the National Federation for the Blind notes in their paper "Vote-By-Mail Toolkit for Disability Rights Advocates", there is a major disadvantage to vote-by-mail only elections: "The paper ballot that is mailed to every registered voter is not accessible to blind, low vision, and other voters with print disabilities."

Given the experiences of the three states that already conduct mail-only elections (Oregon, Washington, and Colorado), we are confident that this barrier can be overcome through the creative use of technology and discussion with the Secretary of State, election commissioners, people with disabilities, and disability advocates. Disability Rights Nebraska is happy to assist in whatever way we can.

We recommend that LB 163 be advanced.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at your convenience: brad@drne.org or 402-474-3183.

Sincerely,

Brad Meurrens
Public Policy Director

Cc: Sen. Blood, Sen. Matt Hansen, Sen. Hilgers, Sen. Hunt, Sen. Kolowski, Sen. La Grone, Sen. Lowe