

# Disability Rights Nebraska

Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities

**Testimony on LB 278  
Before the Banking, Commerce, and Insurance Committee  
Nebraska Legislature  
January 30, 2023**

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Good afternoon Senator Slama 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 at Disability Rights Nebraska. We are the designated Protection and Advocacy organization for people with disabilities in Nebraska. I am here in strong support of LB 278.

Cornell University's 2019 Disability Status Report<sup>1</sup> estimates that almost 10% of our state's population identify as a person with a disability —228,300 individuals of all ages — and there are Nebraskans with disabilities in every county<sup>2</sup>. The report also demonstrates that the living experiences of people with disabilities and those without disabilities are sharply contrasted:

- The poverty rate of working-age people with disabilities in Nebraska was 22%. The poverty rate of working-age people without disabilities in Nebraska was 8%.
- The percentage of working-age people with disabilities working full-time/full-year in Nebraska was 32.7% . The percentage of working-age people without disabilities working full-time/full-year in Nebraska was 70.3%.

People with disabilities are more likely to experience being in poverty over 1 year<sup>3</sup>. Poverty compromises the ability to make rental deposits or other ancillary housing expenses, and disability limits those options even further. For many Nebraskans with disabilities, their future

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<sup>1</sup> Erickson, W. Lee, C., & von Schrader, S. (2023). *2019 Disability Status Report: Nebraska*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Yang Tan Institute on Employment and Disability (YTI). Available at [https://disabilitystatistics.org/reports/2019/English/HTML/report2019.cfm?fips=2031000&html\\_year=2019&subButton=Get+HTML#prev-state](https://disabilitystatistics.org/reports/2019/English/HTML/report2019.cfm?fips=2031000&html_year=2019&subButton=Get+HTML#prev-state)

<sup>2</sup> Paul, S., Rafal, M., & Houtenville, A. (2020). *2019 State Report for Nebraska County-Level Data: Prevalence*. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire, Institute on Disability. See <https://disabilitycompendium.org/>

<sup>3</sup> Peiyun She & Gina A. Livermore, 2009, "Long-Term Poverty and Disability Among Working Age Adults", *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, v. 19, no. 4, p. 247

consists of long waiting lists and decreased availability of affordable, accessible and safe housing<sup>4</sup>.

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) reports that people with disabilities disproportionately experience homelessness: “Point-in-time counts ... suggest that nearly one quarter of individuals experiencing homelessness have a disability, including physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities, as well as mental health and/or substance abuse disorders.”<sup>5</sup>

Homeless shelters are not always accessible to people with disabilities, especially those persons who have assistive technology or equipment (e.g., power wheelchair). Staff may not be adequately trained to work with people with disabilities. Shelters may not have the appropriate technology, equipment, or protocols to address the needs of people with various disabilities. Thus, relying on shelters is an insufficient answer to the issue of homelessness and people with disabilities. Moreover when denied access to shelters, nearly 7 in 10 people with disabilities who experience homelessness stay in dangerous locations (e.g., on sidewalks or under bridges), directly affecting their health outcomes.<sup>6</sup> Vincent Litwinowicz’s [story](#) on KETV presents a stark picture of this reality<sup>7</sup>.

A significant need exists for more safe, affordable, and accessible housing for Nebraskans with disabilities. We are pleased to see the inclusion of “accessibility” in this bill. While building more affordable housing is needed and laudable, especially for Nebraskans with disabilities, the goal is defeated if the housing is not accessible (e.g., steps to the front door prevent a person using a wheelchair from entering). If safe and affordable housing were built accessible, there would be less need to modify or retrofit, decreasing future costs for all involved and increasing housing opportunities for Nebraskans with disabilities—so that they may live, remain, and thrive in their communities.

We recommend advancing LB 278.

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<sup>4</sup> Nebraska Office of Public Guardian, “Annual Report 2015”, page 73. Available at: <https://supremecourt.nebraska.gov/sites/default/files/opg-2015-annual-report.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Thomas, E and Vercruyse, C (2019), “[Homelessness Among Individuals with Disabilities: Influential Factors and Scalable Solutions](#)” *NACCHO Voice*, June 14.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> “Handicap, homelessness a growing problem in Nebraska”, KETV News, August 13, 2015. Available at <https://www.ketv.com/article/handicap-homelessness-a-growing-problem-in-nebraska/7183625>