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General Comment

At Disability Lead, a disability-led organization committed to developing and connecting leaders with disabilities to civic opportunities, we are gravely concerned about laws that deteriorate our voting rights. Last year, we convened an event and conversation with Fair Fight to examine this issue. What was revealed is that even in a state like Illinois with relatively expansive voting access, significant barriers exist.

Disability Lead members and other members of Illinois' disability community shared experiences of barriers that fundamentally strip privacy and dignity from the voting process:

- Physical barriers persist from inaccessible or inconvenient entryways to broken voting machines at wheelchair-accessible booths.
- Lack of privacy for voters who are low-vision. Often, blind and low-vision voters rely on others to help cast their ballot instead of voting independently.
- Difficulty registering. For voters with intellectual and developmental disabilities who may not have a driver's license or state ID have difficulty registering.
- Challenges with language—ballot questions are often written in complicated language instead of plain language. Those who are autistic or experience intellectual and developmental disabilities have difficulty understanding what the question is asking.
- Rarely do poll workers have the experience or training needed to respectfully interact with disabled voters.

People with disabilities have an incredible stake in every election and deserve the opportunity to cast their vote in safe, private, and respectful ways.

As for solutions, we recommend:

1. Additional resources for voting sites to make them, at minimum, ADA compliant, emphasizing voting sites located in under-resourced areas. Too often, a lack of ADA compliance is cited as a reason to shut down voting sites. We do not support that. Instead, we should be asking how to make those sites accessible.
2. Disability training for poll workers. Those who work at the polls must be trained in disability inclusion and understand the needs of disabled voters.

3. Recruitment of the disability community to serve as poll workers and to serve in the electoral process. People with disabilities should be recruited to serve as poll workers, election judges and in other roles in the process. We are in the best position to both help disabled voters and improve on-the-ground and site-specific processes.

We have the right and responsibility to participate in the electoral process—our lives and livelihoods as people with disabilities depend on it. We appreciate the focus on removing barriers and upholding these civil rights that must be protected. Thank you for your consideration. If you have follow up questions, our website is disabilitylead.org