

Dear Chair Birong,

It is with extreme disappointment and a touch of alarm that I am writing you today in my role as the president of the Vermont Coalition of Disability Rights as well as the executive director of the Vermont Center for Independent Living. I just heard some of the testimony today and felt compelled to write quickly in between other meetings.

It appears that your committee has taken extensive testimony about S.298 over the past month including from the Secretary of State's Office which seems to be in the driver's seat on this bill, a bill to protect voters.

Unless I'm mistaken, today was the first time your committee has taken testimony from people impacted by vote denial, including disabled voters (with the exception of possibly on Disability Advocacy Day in February). The Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights is an organization made up of many disability rights organizations, all led by disabled people and family members and the Vermont Center for Independent Living where I'm the executive director is an organization of people with disabilities working together and we are led by disabled Vermonters. We are grateful that your committee included disabled Vermonters as a protected class in the most recent drafts of this bill. We implore you to keep this in.

When it comes to what disabled people need and our civil rights protections, please listen to disabled people including those who shared their testimony today. The Secretary of State's Office has consistently acted against or given inaccurate messaging about the federal and state civil rights of disabled people in regard to voting rights and public participation over the past two years. Disability Rights Vermont, VCIL, the Vermont Human Rights Commission, ACLU, and other disability rights organizations have written numerous letters and responses about this that we can share with you.

Please prioritize what disabled people are asking for in this bill including individual right to action for when the state shirks their responsibilities on protection and enforcement, not the SOS' interpretation of disability rights. VCIL is the Vermont affiliate to the New England ADA Technical Assistance Center and we answer questions regarding the ADA to Vermonters every day.

Having not been invited to come and testify I'm sending this note instead. I welcome that opportunity.

Thank you for your work.

Sarah

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