



Building the Power of the Disability Vote

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I truly feel it is my civic duty to vote. In my younger, better health days, I canvassed neighborhoods for my candidates, I went to the town committee meetings and I even phone banked. I have lived or worked in Washington, Lamoille, Windsor and Chittenden Counties. I have spent my life working for critical nonprofits such as Community Action, homeless shelters, housing programs, and the VT Center for Independent Living. I understand that budgets matter and our representatives make important decisions.

I am a voter and I am your constituent. Yet sometimes I cannot vote.

I have many illnesses including a disease called Ehler's Danlos Syndrome. My doctors call me "medically complex." It is often a struggle for me to walk or stand. I am susceptible to illness. I am hearing and vision impaired.

I am now a Plainfield resident and I will never forget one of the first Town Meetings I attended after moving to town. I did not yet have a walker or cane and I struggled to get in and out of the Plainfield Opera House building on a slight hill, and to get up and down the stairs. I later learned there is an elevator . . . which is great if you can track down the person with the key to it.



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Also, the entire building has one handicapped parking space, so you often have to hike another small hill to get to the meeting. Last, too many people tend to be packed in too small of a place, putting me at high risk for exposure to germs, etc.

After that first meeting, I left huffing, puffing and in tears. A colleague saw me and asked if I was OK. It was a pretty embarrassing experience. Over the years, I felt I had to skip town meetings. I only go now on occasion due to the multiple accessibility issues.

I also had a neighbor recently not attend because she has a profound hearing loss and cannot hear the speakers. She asked if folks could at least write the article we would be voting on, on a sandwich board. That did not happen, so she stayed home.

It is my civic duty and my right to vote. But meetings set up by ableist individuals effectively shuts out a huge segment of the population. People like me.

Disabled Vermonters have received little to no support from officials who are supposed to protect our civil rights. We have essentially been told it is not important enough to focus on.

This is unacceptable and technical voter suppression and it must change immediately. Voting is not only for the healthiest among us. We all matter.
