

Testifier: Michael Sack, Disability Advocate from Minneapolis  
Committee: Elections  
Bill: SF 1636

My name is Michael Sack, a disability advocate from Minneapolis. It is extremely important and essential to have every polling location accessible to voters with physical and developmental disabilities, as well as to blind and hard of hearing individuals. In order to have a fair election, all eligible Minnesotans must be provided features and services to create an easy voting experience. That means all polling locations absolutely should have an accessible entrance, election officials who are trained assisting voters with impairments, multiple ballot-marking machines, and officials who are able to repair the adapted voting devices on site.

Although I fully support the two provisions that would enhance the accessibility of polling facilities, I want to take the time to suggest two things that I believe would make S.F. 1636 stronger and more appropriate. First off, regarding Section 1.29, I want to recommend making it crystal clear that a voter who wants assistance is perfectly allowed to ask an election official for help. As I mentioned earlier, I would like to also propose adding that an election official who knows how to fix a machine is obligated to be stationed at each polling place in case one malfunctions.

Since I have limited dexterity, I use the OmniBallot machine to vote. During the last election, the ballot-marking device would not work when I attempted to select my choices. Neither Election Judge knew how to fix it, so they had to help me fill out a paper ballot. That was successful, but it would have been nice if someone was there who knew how to fix the mechanism. Adding a trained official at each location would be a big benefit for the disability community as it would ease concerns of unsolvable problems from occurring.

If we want to live in a true democracy, we must allow every resident who is eligible to vote and participate in decision-making no matter their ability. That is especially true for residents with disabilities and the programs that assist them, who at times feel like they are not being heard. They definitely have things to say and contribute, however we must provide them the necessary tools to do so! Everyone should feel comfortable to make their voices heard and that all starts with voting!

It is time to invest in us!

Thank you for letting me speak today about this important matter.