

Report on Polling Place Surveys 2018-2019



Minnesota Disability Law Center

The Minnesota Disability Law Center conducted 195 surveys in 20 counties and 90 cities across Minnesota between July and October 2018 with the help of our staff and 45 volunteers. Another 19 surveys were conducted in 7 cities in the metro area in August 2019.

This report highlights the most common concerns we found, discusses the barriers caused by those concerns, and encourages local polling places to continue making polling places accessible for voters with disabilities.

The Minnesota Disability Law Center (MDLC) is the federally-designated network of lawyers and advocates providing free legal help to people with disabilities in civil cases in Minnesota.

We help people with any type of disability, of any age and income level. MDLC is a statewide project of Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid.

MDLC staff and volunteers routinely conduct in-person polling place surveys to evaluate the accessibility of Minnesota's voting sites.

Want to do a polling place survey?
Contact Colleen Daly at
cdaly@mylegalaid.org

Contact MDLC to see if we can help. **All client conversations with MDLC are confidential.** MDLC can provide only advice if that is what you choose. If you would like more than advice, MDLC advocates and lawyers work with clients to develop a plan in their case and get a client's permission before contacting the other side.

CALL OUR INTAKE LINE: INTAKE HOURS Monday through Friday 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 – 3:30 p.m.

(612) 332-1441 (Metro)

(800) 292-4150 (Greater Minnesota)

(612) 332-4668 (TTY)

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Main Findings of Polling Place Surveys

- Overall, the far majority of sites had only a few accessibility issues and election judges expressed the willingness to assist voters.
- Election judges reported high confidence in being able to effectively address problems and many gave examples of success stories.
- While there was widespread compliance and the capacity to effectively address problems as they arose, there were *a number of concerns* that can be corrected with some attention and not significant effort as follows:
- *57% of voting sites did not consistently have large-print voting signs in each voting booth*
 - While many sites indicated they were not given enough signs and came up with other ways to inform voters, the lack of large-print signs may impact a voter's ability to fully and accurately complete the ballot.
- *45% did not have a signature guide available*
 - A signature guide assists voters to place signatures in the designated space. Failure to have the signature in place could result in the ballot not be counted. Some election judges had alternative solutions when there was no signature guide available.

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Main Findings of Polling Place Surveys – Continued

- *34% did not have a fully accessible and private voting table/booth*
 - Often the accessible voting table/booth was too close to other voting areas, lines or polling place workers. This can be corrected easily to ensure privacy of the voting process. There were also some tables/booths that were too low and did not allow people who use wheelchairs to use the table or booth.
- *The majority of polling place sites did not offer the ballot marking machine to all voters unsolicited*
 - Multiple election judges only offered the ballot marking machine to those who appear they may need it and indicated that it is used if people ask for that machine. There are some voters who feel reluctant to ask for the machine due to potential stigma or fear of creating a burden for others. An unsolicited offer could be simply woven into a standard greeting for all voters and eliminate concerns in this area.
- *The majority of sites did not ensure a fully accessible restroom was available*
 - This is a common problem due to the many requirements for restrooms for space needed, height of dispensers, and door size. We encourage election officials to more carefully screen facilities and work with them to correct problems.

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Main Findings of Polling Place Surveys – Continued

- *More infrequent problems included problems with signage for parking areas, signs for accessible entrances, non-functioning automatic doors, and issues with a clear and accessible path to the working area.*
- *The results from the 2018 and 2019 polling place visits were essentially consistent.*
- *MDLC reported the results of these surveys to the Minnesota Secretary of State for further action.*

Summary

Minnesota has a long reputation of ensuring polling place accessibility. There are some consistent problems that may pose barriers to voters with disabilities, but there is general willingness and capacity to ensure these voters have full access to their right to vote.

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More Information on Voting Rights

Find your polling place and get more information on voting

<https://pollfinder.sos.state.mn.us/> and <https://mnvotes.sos.state.mn.us/>

Request an Absentee Ballot

<https://mnvotes.sos.state.mn.us/ABRegistration/ABRegistrationStep1.aspx>

Learn more about voting rights for people with disabilities

Video – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHWjyOu6Fb0>

Factsheet – <https://www.lawhelpmn.org/self-help-library/factsheet/voting-during-covid-19-pandemic>

Other Questions – Contact Justin Page at jmpage@mylegalaid.org

*******MDLC Election Day Hotline: 1-800-292-4150*******

Minnesota Disability Law Center Information

Factsheets- <https://www.lawhelpmn.org/self-help-library/disability>

Website- <https://mylegalaid.org/our-work/disability-law>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/LegalAid>

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