

Disability Rights Iowa
HSB 591 – Testimony in Support
January 25, 2024

Chairpersons and honorable members of the Committee. My name is Catherine E. Johnson. I am the Executive Director of Disability Rights Iowa. DRI is an independent, non-profit agency, which serves as the designated protection and advocacy system for people with disabilities in the state of Iowa, pursuant to federal mandates. The mission of the agency is to protect and advocate for the human and legal rights of Iowans with disabilities. I appear before you today to share DRI's concerns regarding the impact of HSB 591 on the Disability Community.

Americans with Disabilities Act and Voting.

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act requires that state and local governments ensure that individual with disabilities have a full and equal opportunity to vote. The Iowa Secretary of State's intent is to ensure that Iowan Voters with disabilities are fully able to exercise their voting rights at the polls. HSB 591 intent is to remove current barriers in absentee ballot voting and ensure Iowans with disabilities have full and equal access to absentee voting.

HSB 591 removes barriers in absentee voting for individuals with disabilities.

HSB 591 would make absentee voting significantly more accessible for Iowans with disabilities. Traditional absentee voting by mail is not accessible and has created many barriers to voting for Iowans with disabilities. HSB 591 would provide an electronic ballot and allow Iowans with disabilities to mark/vote electronically. HSB 591 removes some of the current barriers in absentee ballot voting. Iowans with disabilities would be able to vote independently and privately using an accessible ballot format. HSB 591 would provide access to absentee ballot voting for Iowans with disabilities.

DRI notes that the pilot program will require individuals to print and mail the absentee ballots. DRI is concerned that this process will create unintended barriers for Iowans with disabilities. To ensure full access to absentee ballot voting, DRI recommends that the pilot program ensure that Iowans with disabilities receive the ballot electronically, mark it electronically and submit the ballot electronically.

HB 591 removes barriers in absentee ballot voting for voters with disabilities. If HB 591 is amended to include the ability for Iowans with disabilities to submit their absentee ballot electronically, this bill will ensure that Iowans with disabilities have full and equal opportunity to vote by absentee ballot. DRI supports HB 591. Thank you in advance for your thoughtful deliberation of our testimony in support of HB 591.