

Voting Is My Favorite Thing



I have voted in every national election, and most state and local elections, since I turned 18. I've stood in lines outside of schools, courthouses, firehouses, retirement homes, and administrative buildings, eager to register my stance on candidates and issues that were important to me. My passion has endured the frustration of watching our political system fail to serve so many people, and of learning in law school how deeply embedded in our system these failures are. Despite all this, I still believe that voting is the most important way that we participate in the democratic system, and my belief in the importance of electoral participation has only gotten stronger since I was diagnosed with MS.

The many hurdles, both practical and emotional, that a person with a disability might face when trying to exercise their right to vote only became apparent as I became acquainted with them myself: losing the ability to walk to school, as after half a mile I found myself tripping and dizzy; becoming unable to summon the strength in my right hand to sign a receipt for my coffee; failing to recognize friends passing on the sidewalk as my vision blurred; missing meetings and blanking on names as my memory became unreliable. And I was very, very tired. At the height of an MS flare, when performing basic, necessary tasks requires momentous effort, voting would cede to more immediate concerns.

But government can help by ensuring that polling places are physically accessible, by providing and maintaining accessible voting equipment, and by making sure that anyone who seeks information about accommodations can easily find it. That's where the federal Elections Assistance Commission comes in, as the primary resource for information regarding voting in the United States, including specific resources for voters with disabilities. Voters with disabilities face a particular set of challenges that others don't face: We cannot always

get to our polling places. Accessible equipment is not always available, and when it is, it doesn't always work as intended.

As a member of the National MS Society's Greater New England Government Relations Committee, I had the opportunity to attend a meeting and training for REV Up America — a nationwide campaign to get out the disability vote — thereby harnessing our community's power to influence decisions of particular importance to us, like social security, Medicare, health care, affordable housing, accessible transportation, employment and more. In that first meeting, we discussed the potential power of the disability vote and the hurdles we face in exercising that power, starting with a simple first step: registering to vote. REV Up's work is the promise held by an organized voting disability community: the promise of influence. The promise of a voice, and a powerful one at that.

Though facing an incurable and unpredictable disease like MS can be disempowering — at times, it has caused me, for one, to doubt my ability to control my life — learning to advocate for myself and for others with MS has been profoundly empowering. Volunteering as an MS activist has encouraged me to educate my legislators about MS and urge them to support measures that make a real difference in the lives of people with MS. Now, by participating in REV Up, I help others in our oft-overlooked community to feel empowered to register their opinions and, hopefully, influence the political conversation.

First, though, we have to show up. [Register to vote!](#)

Editor's Note: Learn more about voter registration, accessibility and your rights [here](#).