

Transcript for Vote for Access- Episode 1: Attitudes

LAWRENCE: I'm an American just like everybody else, and I have a right to vote just like everybody else.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: A young, black woman with arm crutches stands in front of concrete pillars.

IMANI: Why is it important for people with disabilities to vote? Because we're voters and policies affect us. As disabled people, we often deal with stares and invasive questions. But have you ever thought that stereotypes and attitudes could impede our right to vote? My name is Imani Barbarin, I'm a disabled voter, and this is Vote for Access.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: Imani in the studio.

IMANI: Many of us with disabilities started our self-advocacy trying to convince those in our lives that we have every right to vote. Let's talk to Lawrence from North Carolina.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: Lawrence wearing dark glasses.

LAWRENCE: Sometimes you have that, "I'm sure they don't know what they're doing," whispers going on. "Why is he coming to vote? He doesn't need to be here, he can't see. Well, he doesn't know what he's doing. Does he even know what he's voting for?"

IMANI: Family members, caregivers, and even poll workers wrongly assume that people with intellectual or developmental disabilities can't understand the issues or make an informed choice. People have been turned away at the polls because of this harmful misconception. Let's hear from Ric from Alaska.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: Ric and an interpreter.

RIC: One negative stereotype is that people think people with disabilities are not educated on politics. I am very educated on politics.

IMANI: Guardians can feel overwhelmed or don't see the point in helping disabled people they work with register to vote. As we think of ways to improve elections, we must prioritize access. Because of dismissive attitudes, many disabled voters aren't aware that there are accommodations available to us.

STARR: I think sometimes people don't ask for accommodations 'cause they assume it's gonna come with maybe an eye-roll or a judgment from a poll worker. My name is Starr Dobush, and I live in Ashland, Ohio. I have dyslexia. In 2019 was the first year I actually asked about accommodations. You know, I'm going to the library and I'm requesting audiobooks, or I'm going to the grocery store, and I'm having someone tell me aloud what it is that is written on the screen. Why would I not have that same accommodation when I'm voting for our leaders? I figured I would just ask for the ballot to be read aloud to me. And it really helped me to solidify what I was voting on and understand what I was voting on.

IMANI: Providing accommodations for people with disabilities to vote is the law. It's not a partisan issue; it's not a choice.

LAWRENCE: Ask me what I want instead of telling me what I want would go a long way toward understanding what I'm all about.

IMANI: Voting is participating. And in a country that often relegates disabled people to institutions, isolation, and stereotypes, participation is powerful. However, some folks just don't think disabled people should vote. I think those people should be quiet. We should be able to vote with the proper supports without misguided assumptions about our capacity.

RIC: I want politicians to realize that we are one-fifth of the voting population, and that you need to hear what we have to say.

IMANI: Even your rideshare driver may question your desire to vote. That's if they don't cancel immediately after seeing your crutches or service animal. But that's a story for another feature-length video. If you don't think disabled people should vote, hold that ableism inside. And if you're a disabled voter like me, stay firm and advocate for your right to vote. You have the right to private, independent voting. You have the right to an Accessible Voting Center that has an Accessible Voting Machine available. You also have the right to bring someone to assist you. Most importantly, you have the right to vote. We could talk about voting all day, but what we want is to make inclusivity at the polls a priority for every election. We want disabled folks and non-disabled allies to fight for our vote together. Let's share resources and information to make voting easier for everyone. For specific information about the rights in your state, and for advocacy resources, reach out to your state's Protection and Advocacy agency. Each

state has a Protection and Advocacy agency that exists to protect the rights of people with disabilities. And keep watching this series at VoteForAccess.us.

RIC: This is Vote for Access.