

'Voting polls access for disabled must improve'

• By DANIELLE ZIRI

More improvement needs to be made in accessibility of voting polls for people with disabilities, NGO Access Israel chairman Yuval Wagner told *The Jerusalem Post* Tuesday, as municipal elections were underway.

The NGO, which works to advance the rights of people with disabilities in the country, had published on its website earlier this week a list of 14 municipalities' polling stations and information about what each is doing in terms of access for people with disabilities.

Among those listed were Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Beersheba, Ashdod, Modi'in, Herzliya, Ra'anana, Hod Hasharon, Kfar Saba, Bnei Brak, Givatayim, Shoham, Karmiel, and Kiryat Bialik.

In most of the cities, between 10 and 20 percent of voting stations were made accessible for people with disabilities.

Jerusalem, however, remains below this percentage with only 42 accessible polling stations out of the 767 available across the city. In Ashdod, only 22 voting stations were made

accessible, about 8 percent of the 283 in the city.

One of the best efforts to be made in accessibility can be seen in Kiryat Bialik, which has made all of its 58 voting polls accessible to the handicapped and added seven special accessibility stations. In the past, this municipality has received two awards for accessibility and tolerance.

While almost all of the municipalities have made handicapped parking available close to the accessible voting polls, none of them offer a transportation service for people with disabilities to reach the polls, which the municipalities wrote, is the responsibility of the person's family or friends.

According to Wagner, however, the main problem lies in the fact that most municipalities have poorly publicized the locations of the accessible voting stations.

"A lot of municipalities simply didn't publish anything, and even those which did, didn't put the information in the most convenient places," he said. "On the Interior Ministry's website we saw that the

list of accessible stations, which was really hard to find, does not match those of the municipalities.

"The thing that made us even more angry is that on the same site, they give a phone number to call for information on voting procedures for the disabled, but how does a deaf or hearing impaired person get information if they can't speak on the phone? And how is a blind person supposed to even know about this number if the only way to get it is to see it on the site?"

Wagner told the *Post*, "A person with disabilities already thinks twice before getting out of the house and going to vote, so correct and detailed information is crucial."

Member of the Board of the organization Bizchut, The Israel Human Rights Center for People with Disabilities, Mandy Leighton toured Jerusalem voting polls on Tuesday and said she found discrepancies between the information published on the municipality's website and the actual situation: At least two of the polls listed as accessible were not.