

Disability Advocates Warn the For the People Act's Paper Ballot Mandate Will Disenfranchise Voters with Disabilities

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WASHINGTON, DC – Today, the undersigned disability organizations express deep concerns over the paper ballot mandate included in the [For the People Act](#) (H.R. 1/S. 1). Additionally, organizations offer proposed changes to reduce the harm of the mandate to voters with disabilities.

The For the People Act in particular contains numerous provisions to expand voting access in the United States by addressing the many barriers to voting in America, such as onerous registration and vote by mail systems, and limited voting hours across the country. Further, the bill prohibits deceptive practices and prevents voter intimidation, prohibits voter caging, and restores federal voting rights to disenfranchised Americans.

The legislation also includes specific provisions enhancing access for voters with disabilities. The For the People Act ensures drop boxes are fully accessible; and invests in the research and development of accessible voting machines. However, the bill also contains a mandate requiring paper ballots to be used in both in-person and remote voting, which undermines the goals of the bill by restricting access for many voters with disabilities.

In recent years, several pieces of legislation have included a "voter-verified" paper ballot mandate. We have and will continue to advocate against any paper ballot mandate to prevent the disenfranchisement of voters with disabilities. In January 2021, twenty national disability organizations [issued a joint statement](#) expressing concerns over any federal paper ballot mandate and its impact on voters with print disabilities. Any mandate of a paper-based voting system will inevitably harm voters with print disabilities as it would: 1.) end all voting system innovation and advancement to produce a fully accessible voting system that provides enhanced security; 2.) limit voters with disabilities' federal right to privately and independently verify and cast their ballots, and; 3.) ultimately segregate voters with disabilities.

Although, paper-based ballot voting options have become the preferred voting system to people who believe mandating the use of paper ballots is necessary to ensure the security of elections, it must be made abundantly clear that the ability to privately and independently hand mark, verify, and cast a paper ballot is impossible for many voters with print disabilities.

Earlier this spring the United States House of Representatives passed the For the People Act, and the legislation is now being considered in the U.S. Senate. In late March, the Senate held its first [hearing](#) on the bill and prior to the Senate's May [markup](#), national disability organizations once again [outlined](#) their concerns and offered necessary improvements and changes to the bill's paper ballot mandate. Unfortunately, the fears of disability advocates on how the paper mandate will impact voters with print disabilities have not been addressed and only minimal changes have been made to the mandate to protect the rights of voters with disabilities.

We urge Congress to make changes to the For the People Act, excluding voters with disabilities, covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), from having to use a voter-verified paper ballot for both in-person and remote voting. Until fully accessible paper-ballot voting systems, ready for widespread use, are available, accessible in-person and vote-by-mail voting options must be offered to ensure all voters in America can receive, mark, verify, and cast a private and independent ballot. The For the People Act cannot eliminate the only accessible voting options for many voters with disabilities, including Direct Recording Electronic (DRE) voting machines and electronic absentee or vote-by-mail systems that make voting accessible to voters with disabilities as many states have already tried to expand access to voters with disabilities during the 2020 elections.

While the For the People Act will remove significant barriers to voting for people with disabilities, without addressing the unintended consequences of the paper ballot mandate, this important voting legislation will disenfranchise many voters with disabilities. Simply put, the current paper ballot mandate in the For the People Act will exclude many voters from the ballot box, counteracting the purpose of this well-intended and important legislation.

Before paper-based voting systems become the law of the land, the concerns of voters with disabilities must be addressed.

For questions, please contact Lilian Aluri at laluri@aapd.com or Erika Hudson at Erika.hudson@ndrn.org.

Signed,

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