

Comments to NIST Regarding Voting Access For Persons With Disabilities

I am a person with a disability. I have End-Stage Secondary Progressive Multiple Sclerosis. As a result of this, I have severe mobility limitations, double vision (partly correctable with lenses), fatigue, difficulty with small motor skills, and a speech impediment.

These physical limitations cause the following **obstacles** to my exercising my voting rights:

- I cannot transport myself to the polls, wait in line, and use the voting machines, as most citizens do. The problems for me are mobility, inability to drive, fatigue, and vision.
- The print size on paper ballots and (I believe) the voting machines is too small for me.
- My small motor problems prevent me from reliably marking a paper ballot with the small circles to color in.
- My speech impediment makes me unable to use the ballot marking tool that the state is willing to supply. It may help some disabled people, but I don't think it would help me. The speech synthesizer which reads the ballot, and the speech recognition software which it uses is probably unable to work with my speech

impediment. I don't qualify for a speech device, and from what I have seen of such devices, they would be unable to speak the voter's choices on the ballot.

- Therefore, I need human assistance to mark my ballot.
- For unknown reasons, my local registrar's office rejected by ballots when the assistant was my spouse. They accepted them when the assistant was a friend or my brother. Not all disabled people can try different assistants like this.

Helping the disabled vote privately and independently

- The ballot marking tool is a good idea. Test such a tool with the help of people with a variety of disabilities. Disclose what disabilities and combinations of disabilities it accommodates. Test the speech recognition with disabled people whose speech is difficult to understand.
- Develop a list of trusted assistants, volunteers under the registrar's office, for disabled people who still require human assistance.
- Publicize specific available accommodations for various disabilities. Provide contact information for disabled people having difficulty finding accommodations to enable them to vote.
- Educate elections officials about the civil rights of the disabled concerning voting. If any definable interest group, including the disabled, is prevented from voting, it could swing the results of a close election.

- If the registrar's office rejects anyone's ballot, let them explain why they did so. Let it not be arbitrary and capricious.

What the **United States of America** can do to help the disabled exercise their voting rights

- Subsidize the development of voting tools to assist people with disabilities in voting, or purchase a good tool from those already available and distribute it to state departments of elections, disability rights groups, and/or the disabled directly, to avoid multiple wasteful duplication of effort.
- Make available educational materials to states to use in education of elections officials about the civil rights of the disabled concerning voting. Allow states to add state specific material.
- Find, if possible, or develop standards and plans for accessible voting stations for localities to use, after testing them with people with a variety of disabilities. Does a group like adata.org already have acceptable plans for this?