

Disability Consulting & Advocacy

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Testimony, House Elections Committee

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Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD)

CTD has been deeply involved with HAVA and the Secretary of State since the debut of Texas' response to HAVA, including an appointment to serve on the state's HAVA Advisory Committee and input to the Secretary of State's Elections Division on the Texas' HAVA implementation plan. CTD is a regular presenter to the Secretary of State's Annual Election Law Seminars and has conducted numerous hands-on workshops for voters with disabilities throughout Texas. CTD serves as an expert resource on disability issues for the SOS VOTEXAS program.

Why electronic voting technology?

1. Voter registration is lower for people with disabilities than for people without disabilities (62% versus 78% respectively)
2. 41% of voting-age Americans with disabilities voted in 2000, compared to 51% of all voting-age Americans. In Texas, only 34.5% of voting-age people with disabilities voted.
3. The value of the private ballot: a focus group of people with disabilities, when asked to measure the personal importance of a private ballot on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being lowest and 5 highest, every participant rated this a 5.

Is It Accessible?

Texas voters with blindness survey:

- 87% said voting was easier with the machines

Mobility impaired survey:

- 83% very easy or easy to use machines

Hearing impaired survey:

- 86% very easy or easy to use machines

All surveys, reason most cited for concern is inadequate poll worker training.

Security and Accuracy

Rated good or excellent (source: American Association of People with Disabilities):

DRE = 67%

Precinct –count scan= 64%

Vote by mail = 36%

Internet= 28%

Voter-Verifiable Paper Trail

National disability groups opposed passage of H.R. 811 Voter Confidence and Increase Accessibility Act. This bill, as written, does not adhere to the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) requirement that voting systems be accessible to voters with disabilities "in a manner that provides the same opportunity for access and participation (including privacy and independence) as for other voters."

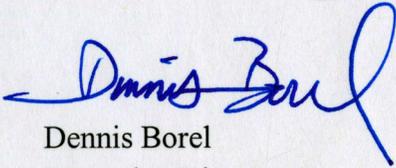
There is no paper trail verifiable by people with blindness. Other voters with disabilities may not be able to handle, verify and cast a paper ballot without assistance.

Recommendations:

1. **Protect voters with disabilities from disenfranchisement.** In 2007, several bills were filed to eliminate HAVA requirements from certain elections, at least one proposed bill sought to eliminate requirements from jurisdictions of up to 25,000 voters. Yet voters with disabilities reside throughout Texas and have found electronic voting technology to be overwhelmingly accessible. They are receiving the message that all polling places will offer an accessible voting system with the limited exception of very sparsely populated jurisdictions conducting non-federal elections. The Legislature should not pass any legislation to expand the current limited exception.

2. **Put voter-verifiable paper trails on hold.** At this time, there is no technology that would allow a person with blindness to verify a paper ballot. There is also a question that paper trails would require an assistant to a voter with disability, thereby compromising the secret ballot.
3. **Support poll worker training.** No matter the specific disability, voters with disabilities have consistently identified a need for poll worker training in personal interactions, demonstration of accessibility features and techniques for guaranteeing polling place accessibility.
4. **More outreach to voters with disabilities on voting.** Participation of voters with disabilities still lags behind the general population and many hold misconceptions of voting technology and HAVA rights.

For A Barrier Free Texas,



Dennis Borel
Executive Director