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United States Election Accessibility Commission

1225 New York Avenue NW, Suite 1100,

Washington, DC 20005

Re: Commission's request for input on the voting accessibility initiative.

NCIL is committed to increasing the participation of people with disabilities in the electoral process. NCIL has long advanced the voting rights of people with disabilities and will continue to do so until all barriers – be they physical, programmatic or attitudinal – be eliminated. NCIL would like to offer feedback from real voters who used voting machines in the November, 2008 Presidential election. NCIL feels that these comments provide valuable feedback about the improvements that have yet to be made in the field of accessible voting machines. NCIL would then like to offer specific recommendations to the Commission.

Voting machines have been implemented in polling places to maximize accessibility for persons with disabilities and anyone else experiencing difficulties in voting. However, while trying to utilize the newly purchased machines during this past election, many problems arose as demonstrated below. These comments are from real voters throughout the nation:

- The screen was visible to other people waiting to vote, therefore privacy was not possible.
- The machine was situated in a space which did not allow a person in a wheelchair to comfortably move around it. After it became obvious the space was too small, the machine was moved.
- Poll workers were “deciding” who should use the machine based upon a visual assessment. It did not seem that there were standard protocols for use or for letting all voters know the machine was available for anyone.
- People with disabilities were targeted.
- The headphones were inadequate for filtering out background noise.
- Several people complained that they could not hear the instructions.
- One person stated that the computer “froze” three times during her voting process. Eventually a technician from the county office was brought in to fix the problem. But, it took her a long time to actually vote.

- Poll workers were not prepared to assist people with disabilities who used the machine.

NCIL would now like to offer specific recommendations to the Commission:

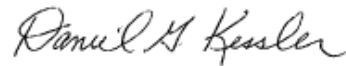
- **Clearer Audio Formats:** Many voting machines utilize audio as a means for a voter to decipher their choices at the polls. Many people have difficulty hearing the audio selections due to the quality of the audio, speed of the audio, background noise, and hearing and comprehension difficulties. NCIL recommends that voting machines have adjustable volume levels and clear and easy to understand speech.
- **Simplified Language:** People with learning and comprehension difficulties find themselves at a disadvantage at the poll when the language used on a machine is difficult to understand. NCIL recommends that the machines utilize simple, easy-to-understand language for the instructions and any information on the ballot.
- **Party Icons by Candidate Names:** NCIL believes that people with visual disabilities and those who have learning and literacy disabilities are unable to differentiate candidates by party affiliation. NCIL recommends using party logos and symbols next to a candidate's name.
- **Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail:** NCIL does not have a blanket policy either for or against Voter Verified Paper Audit Trails (VVPAT) or other means of independent vote verification. However, NCIL seeks to ensure that any and all measures instituted to provide enhanced security, accuracy and/or voter confidence must be developed and implemented in a manner that ensures immediate accessibility for people with disabilities. Such measures must not interfere with the current ability of voters with disabilities to cast private and independent ballots, as mandated by HAVA. The disability community shares the interest of all Americans in ensuring that elections are fair, secure and accurate. If a paper audit trail or other means of independent vote verification is used in any jurisdiction, then the means of vote verification must be accessible to all individuals with disabilities at the same time as the requirement goes into effect for all voters. Accordingly, NCIL would oppose any paper audit trail or other means of independent vote verification requirement that does not meet this standard.
- **Training and Technical Assistance to Poll Workers:** NCIL feels that to better prepare poll workers to troubleshoot problems with voting machines, which then inhibit voters from casting their ballots, sufficient training and technical assistance should be mandated for each polling location with an accessible voting machine. Ideally, the manufacturers of such equipment should be required to provide initial and ongoing training and technical assistance to poll workers at each location.

We appreciate the Commission's willingness to hear public comment about this important topic. We welcome any questions or follow-up the Commission seeks.

Sincerely,



Executive Director
National Council on Independent Living



President
National Council on Independent Living