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Promoting Access To Voting

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General Comment

my name is Shyla Patera. I am an Independent Living Specialist employed by and I represent North Central Independent Living Services, Inc. in Black Eagle ,Montana.My Center for Independent Living serves north central Montana from the Blackfeet nation which is within Glacier County to the North Dakota border. NCILS assists people to navigate systems in order to live independently in communities. As a systems advocate and a Montanan with a disability , I often help Montanans with disabilities access voting via mail and in person. I commend the National Institute of Standards and Technology for studying accessible standards and technology which assist Americans to vote. Many of these questions you are asking as a part of this RFI involve access to technology and information regarding candidates, ballot access as well as voting procedures. Those with sensory disabilities often need accessible formats in Braille, large print ,or screen reader format.

Many people with various disabilities could benefit from ballot initiative language, candidates position information as well as ,election proceedings in plain language Accessible voting machines should highlight a n ability to caption text in ASL or plain language as well. The ability to vote independently ultimately relies on an individual knowing how he , she or they choose to vote.Access to the ballot if a person needs help filling out a ballot and or operating technology there should be a way to transcribe a vote on paper either through an accessible voting device or working through and with someone's computer. Many rural counties often may have a difficult financial time purchasing accessible screen reading and voting machines such as the auto mark. If polling places are in various communities or senior centers , there may be issues with transporting both voters and machines to polling places! The accessibility of voting in Montana often depends on how far a citizen lives from a mail box ,the county seat, collection dropbox, or one's polling place there are often issues collecting ballots along with ensuring accessible voting machines. accessible voting often depends on where the person lives. Accessible polling places often have known barriers such as stairs ,non-accessible visual

signage and other issues. ie accessible restrooms A poll worker and county elections staff can make reasonable accommodations to vote. However, these can cause issues in their own right if poll workers, election judges, and election staff are unaware of voting machines and basic accessibility accommodation issues. I would also look at placement of accessible voting options and machines. I would train election judges not only on state laws regarding voter eligibility and how people with disabilities need accommodations not only regarding eligibility to vote, but also disability etiquette. I would also train state, county, and city election staff on accessibility of voting in person as well as mail or electronic ballot voting and return. I would hope that NIST would work with the US Access Board, the United States Department of Justice, as well as Secretaries of State to implement, clarify as well as fund accessible voting procedures and systems. Thank you for the opportunity to comment upon this RFI.