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General Comment

Although Rhode Island offered accessible mail ballot in the 2020 election where a voter who is blind, visually impaired or has a print disability could use their access technology to complete the ballot independently, this assumes that everyone had a printer which is not the case. I know several individuals who did not use the accessible ballot option because they did not have access to a printer. I used the mail ballot option in a special election this spring. However, I needed sighted assistance to check that the ballot actually printed and to show me where to sign the envelope. Although I was able to fill my ballot independently, it was not private. I know someone who needed to email the ballot to his wife in order to print it. This is not secure or private. We need the ability to receive and return mail ballots electronically in order to ensure that we are able to cast our votes privately and independently. There is technology that ensures the security of the ballots.

The PDF application for mail ballot is not fully accessible and again we need access to a printer in order to mail the application. This application process is a barrier for people to vote. Prior to 2020 Presidential election the application was inaccessible and cumbersome. I worked with the Secretary of State's office to stream line the process for people with disabilities to apply for accessible ballots. We want the ability to fill out and submit the applications for mail ballots online so that it is fully accessible.

I also feel that Rhode Island's 2 witness requirement poses a barrier especially for people with disabilities. Some people may live alone and only have access to one individual during the application period. So that means their right to vote is taken away? It's no one's business if and how we choose to vote. We should not need to jump through hoops to exercise our right to vote.

As I write this I am recalling my initial experience with trying to vote in the early 2000's. I had to take time out of work to go to City Hall to fill 2 applications. One application was for the mail in ballot and the

other was for the accessible ballot. application for mail ballot had to be either signed by 2 witnesses or notarized. Today, Rhode Island still has 2 witness or notary requirement for mail ballots which is a barrier to vote.

I was extremely excited when Rhode Island deployed the AutoMark at each polling location in 2006. No more hoops to jump through in order to vote! I can not describe the feeling I had when I was able to vote independently and privately at the poll like my sighted counterparts. Finally I could cast my vote independently. It felt very empowering. But I have also experience difficulties with poor poll worker training and have filed administrative complaints with disability rights organization in my State in previous elections. For example, in one election I was wrongly not allowed to put my ballot in the scanner. My ballot was put in the provisional envelope.

We have one accessible machine at each poll in our State, but I have heard that poll workers do not tell disabled voters that it is available if they wish. I missed one election because the machine was broken and although I waited they were not able to repair it. I do not drive and so I was not able to return later in the day to see if the machine had been repaired and therefore, I was not able to exercise my constitutional right to vote.

I am sharing these experience to illustrate how often those of us with disabilities encounter barriers while trying to exercise our constitutional right to vote. Voting should be easy and accessible to all of us.

Thank you.