

Secretary of State Email Shannon Wegele

Dear Shannon,

I would like to say a few words regarding your response to my colleague Nathanael Wales. Just because the law in Connecticut “allows someone else to fill out our ballot” does not mean that is an acceptable practice to the blind. We have the right to independent and private voting just as much as our sighted peers do. That right was given to us 30 years ago, by a higher law known as The Americans with Disabilities Act. Title II of that act specifically addresses voting. Title II of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Title II requires that voters with disabilities must be provided an opportunity to exercise their right to vote that is equal to the opportunity provided to voters without disabilities. This means that states and local jurisdictions that have converted to all vote-by-mail, or are in the process of converting to all vote-by-mail, must provide an accessible way for the blind, low vision and other print disabled voters to mark their ballot privately and independently at home, work, or other convenient location. During the COVID-19 Pandemic we should have an accessible way to vote at home and not put our health at risk. I personally have just finished almost a year of cancer treatment and will not risk being exposed in August or November. That does not mean I do not want to vote.

At this time at least sixteen other states have enrolled in some kind of electronic voting system. In most cases the print disabled person marks their ballot using whatever talking software they have on their computer. Once their ballot is complete it is printed out and mailed back just like everyone else. Checking the security of a system like this should not take more than two months, it should not take even one month.

I heard Secretary of State Merrill speak at the hearing last Tuesday. She said she wanted accessible voting for all, yet she does not really mean accessible absentee ballot voting for all. Secretary Merrill still expects the blind or print disabled to go to the polling stations. I know about the laptops, I’ve used them before. How can it be acceptable to use a computer at the polling station that prints out our ballot but not one at our homes?

If she would just reach out to other states and talk with a few of them that have these systems already in place it might put her mind at ease regarding their security. Please ask her to do so when she returns. I have attached language from the state of Colorado for her review.

Thank you for listening to me,

Best Regards,

**Maryanne Melley
President
National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut
860-212-5549**

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