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DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL
LANSING

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RE: NIST-2021-0003 Request for Information, Docket No. 210608-0123

Thank you for accepting information regarding accessible voting for people with disabilities. Voting is one of the most important acts of citizenry that one can exercise in a democracy. It is a fundamental civil right for all individuals, including people with disabilities. There should be seamless access to the polls meeting all accessibility standards, information shared in a way that is universally understood, as well as easy registration regardless of where you live. It is with these foundational beliefs that we respectfully submit the following comments.

Accessibility:

Accessibility needs to be the centralized issue when examining the entire voting process. This is not just centered just on physical accessibility, but rather full accessibility for all individuals who experience barriers to complete engagement in the voting process. People who have cognitive, sight, hearing, physical, and mental disabilities require many different levels of accommodations. We must examine how to diminish all the barriers so that everyone has equitable access and can participate in the electoral process. By addressing accessibility, it demonstrates inclusiveness of all individuals, especially people with disabilities and our senior population.

- All polling locations must be ADA accessible. There needs to be a definitive date to establish compliance of ADA accessibility standards for all polling locations by the 2024 Presidential Election.
- Ballots must be made available in an accessible format. Example, ballots must be made available in large print, e-reader accessible, braille, as well as in additional languages for non-English speaking people.
- Ballots and ballot proposals must be drafted in plain language.
- Drop boxes must be made accessible to people utilizing mobility devices. The handle or access slot must be at a level that individuals in a seated position must be able to reach.
- Electronic ballots must be made available to people with disabilities who experience difficulties with manual dexterity. This would allow people to point and click the appropriate selection of their choosing.

Training of Poll Workers:

There is a considerable differential in the level of knowledge of poll workers who assist people with disabilities. The lack of familiarity with accessible voting equipment, firsthand understanding of accessibility requirements, the requirements of privacy when casting a ballot, and people not willing to assist with those needing accommodations, all lead to substantial barriers for people with disabilities.

- Poll workers with disabilities may need accommodations to carry out their duties.
- Training for all poll workers must include how to request and provide specific accommodations needed by those individuals as required by federal law.
- Poll workers handbooks must be provided by HAVA funding and all training materials must include a section on working with the people with disabilities and an outline of ADA requirements for accommodations.
- If a polling location serves a large population, there must be an American Sign Language interpreter on site.

Transportation:

Transportation continues to be a tremendous barrier for people with disabilities. We fully support the adaptation of absentee voting, however, many people with disabilities want to engage in the electoral process in person.

- There must be public transportation, where available, provided to people with disabilities, to and from the polling location, during the polling hours at no cost to the individual.

Other Considerations:

- All accessible voting machines must have same level of privacy as all other polling stations.
- Federal law must require all Help American Vote Act funding to be utilized to increase accessibility and participation in the voting process. Currently in Michigan, there is legislation introduced that would allow the legislature to forgo any funding that is not appropriated by the legislature. This type of maneuver politicizes the accessibility and participation of people with disabilities, people of color, and other marginalized populations in the voting process.

Respectfully submitted by:

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