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General Comment

Greetings,

IN September 2019, I initiated a conversation with Alabama's Secretary of State John Merrill, seeking ways to give blind citizens the opportunity to cast an electronic safe, private vote. After a few meetings, we were told this was possible. IN June of 2020 we received word that the platform was close to completion and by July we could test the system to ensure everything would be ready for The November election. IN August, Secretary Merrill's office indicated that everything was off the table. Reasons being, they did not have enough time to implement the project, even though companies executed this platform in a two week time frame. Secondly, the company they chose was not a reputable company, according to them.

IN February of 2020 we discovered that the secretary's office, Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind and Representative Hurst drafted a bill, which, the blind of Alabama was totally in opposition of. Several meetings ensued voicing our displeasure with the proposed bill. The agency would provide computers, screen readers and other items necessary to vote. There was no clear direction how the process would occur. The entities mentioned above was adamant toward pushing their agenda forward without any comments from us. Some of our concerns to this bill are listed below.

- * Limits number of blind people being served due to lack of affiliation with agency.
- * Requires those already having the ability and means to vote electronically be left out of this process.
- * Circuit Clerks have voiced their opposition to this bill based on numerous unknown variables.
- * The bill does not express the wishes of the blind community and it would add another level of bureaucracy that will impede our ability to vote independently.

* Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind has no credentials to certify individuals as blind.

* Individuals may receive equipment but lack the skills to operate the equipment and therefore remove any level of privacy.

Members of our Alabama National Federation of the Blind were able to contact other legislators to speak in opposition during the legislative session and the bill was carried over. This bill may resurface during our next session.

Also, there were problems at voting locations reported to me of accessible voting machines absent, poll workers unable to give instruction on how to use the machine, having to cast ballot on accessible machine in a supply closet, etc. Equality should be in place for all citizens.

Thanks,

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