

Introduction

- Thank you for the invitation and your leadership. My name is Fred Nisen, and I am the managing attorney for the Voting Rights Practice Group at Disability Rights California (DRC).
- As the statewide protection and advocacy organization for people with disabilities, DRC is dedicated to ensuring the rights and services of voters with disabilities throughout California.
 - Hotline
 - Poll Monitoring
 - Election Worker Training
 - Comment on County Election Administration Plans
 - State and Local Voting Accessibility Advisory Committees
 - CA Motor Voter Taskforce
 - Conservatorships: Voting Rights Reinstatement
- California has made great strides making elections more accessible. Bills like Assemblymember Low's AB 683 required the SOS to establish a Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee and Assemblymember Pellerin's AB 545 will bring us curbside voting at all voting locations.
- However, based on our work we know that many voters with disabilities do not know about these changes and the many ways they can vote privately and independently in California.
 - Many voters don't know about RAVBM, how to use it or whether it is accessible to them.
 - Many voters don't even know that every voting location has BMDs.

Strategies for Closing the Participation Gap for Voter with Disabilities

- A recent Rutgers University study showed that there was a 3.6% voter participation gap between voters with disabilities and voters without disabilities in 2022.
- Education and Outreach Funding
 - Mail and print does not always reach voters with disabilities. For example, printed materials are not accessible to blind voters and some voters with low vision. Also, voters with disabilities who are homeless may not have easy access to their mail.
 - The VCA approach requiring all types of media and community input is a best practice, but it needs more \$.
- Dedicated County Elections Staff who participate with community outreach efforts regularly to educate and inform voters.
 - Some big counties have this, but many small counties do not.
- Better and more accessible election information for voters.
 - Regularly update information on County websites.
 - Partner with the disability community to develop messaging and disseminate key information.
 - Provide an online calendar with relevant events.
 - Include information on how voters can request information in alternate formats, including ASL interpretation.
- Make RAVBM fully accessible for voters with print disabilities, such as people who are blind or people who cannot handle paper. RAVBM needs an electronic return option for voters who cannot print and mail the ballot back.
 - CA is a leader on voting accessibility but not in this area. At least 10 other states have some form of electronic ballot return for people with print disabilities.

Conclusion

- Closing the voter participation gap for voters with disabilities will have a substantial impact because more than 1 out of every 5 people in California have a disability.
- Thank you and I welcome your questions.