



Susan Bysiewicz
SECRETARY OF THE STATE
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- NEWS RELEASE -

VOTING RIGHTS FOR VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES EXTEND TO LOCAL LEVEL

BLUMENTHAL'S OPINION SUPPORTS BYSIEWICZ'S POSITION: TOWNS REQUIRED TO MAKE VOTING ACCESSIBLE TO THOSE WITH DISABILITIES IN LOCAL ELECTIONS

Hartford: At the Secretary of the State's request, Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal has issued a formal opinion as to whether Connecticut's "Voter Bill of Rights" requires municipalities to provide a voting system accessible to the physically disabled in each polling place in non-federal elections, including the 2007 elections.

Secretary Bysiewicz is pleased that Attorney General Blumenthal has concluded that Connecticut law grants voters with disabilities, "... the right to vote privately and independently, and requires all polling places to provide a voting system that provides such private and independent access by physically disabled voters."

"All voters should be able to vote independently and privately, regardless of who is on the ballot or when the ballot is being cast," said Bysiewicz. "I appreciate Attorney General Blumenthal's thoughtful and thorough opinion on this important civil rights matter. There is, of course, much

work to be done before Election Day to ensure that local registrars and poll workers are properly trained and that all voters know their rights.”

The state requirement essentially mirrors federal law, as defined in the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2004. According to HAVA, any voting system used in a federal election must “be accessible for individuals with disabilities, including nonvisual accessibility for the blind and visually impaired, in a manner that provides the same opportunity for access and participation (including privacy and independence) as for other voters.”

To satisfy HAVA’s requirement that each polling place be equipped with at least one accessible voting machine, the Secretary of the State’s office purchased a vote-by-phone voting system in 2006 for all polling places in Connecticut. More than 400 voters took advantage of the vote-by-phone technology in last year’s elections. Secretary Bysiewicz has argued that, according to state statute, municipalities must make similar technology available for non-federal elections as well.

Attorney General Blumenthal clearly agrees and says it is up to the Secretary of the State to determine what technology is best suited to ensure that those with disabilities are fully enfranchised. In a letter to Secretary Bysiewicz, he writes, “Alternative machines or systems may be permissible, and can be considered by municipal voting officials, but they would have to obtain your approval before using such alternatives in the election.” The vote-by-phone technology used by voters with disabilities in the 2006 elections will be available for the Nov. 2007 elections.

Dr. Chris Kuell, Second Vice President of the National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut, said, “The National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut has long advocated for full inclusion of blind people in the voting process. We believe the right to vote privately and independently are fundamental to a democracy and concur with Attorney General Blumenthal’s conclusions that all communities must provide a private and independent way for those with disabilities to vote. The National Federation of the Blind will continue to work with Secretary Bysiewicz to bring full inclusion to the voting process at all levels--Federal, State, and Municipal.”

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