



WASHINGTON

State Independent Living Council

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Position on Elections and Voting Rights

Washington State Independent Living Council
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Position

The Washington State Independent Living Council (SILC) strongly believes that the right to vote is one of the most basic and fundamental rights we share as eligible and active Americans. The SILC encourages universal access to voting through integrating technologies that allow persons to register to vote and cast private ballots. Additionally, the SILC believes that promoting accessible polling sites, encouraging alternative voting options, such as mail and absentee balloting, are also ways to get more and more individuals to exercise their rights to vote. Lastly, the SILC strongly believes that counties must follow applicable voter laws to ensure that all of their voting programs, including advertising and registration, are universally accessible.

Background

- Historically, people with disabilities have not been able to claim the full measure of their right to vote.
- A “secret ballot” has not existed for many years.
- Physical barriers are still in place to this day.
- The United States Congress passed and President Bush signed into law the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) for the express purpose of making the voting process inclusive for all, particularly those citizens with significant disabilities.
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- Through HAVA, states are being provided with federal funds to purchase fully accessible voting machines which improve election procedures and finally remove most of the systemic and physical barriers that have denied the disabled an equal opportunity to cast a secret ballot. In addition, there funds were allocated for the purpose of training poll workers on the county and precinct level.
- It has taken time to finally produce an updated and reprogrammed voting machine, which is fully qualified by Federal standards to accomplish a more accessible voting procedure for the significantly disabled.
- There have been other federal voting rights acts as well that protect and promote the rights of people to vote, including the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (Motor Voter) and the Voting Rights Act of 1965
- Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails. The SILC does not take an official position on whether these should be implemented. However, should they be, they must be accessible to all persons.
- Voter Identification. It is important that voter ID laws do not restrict the rights of individuals to cast a ballot at the polling place.

Conclusion

People with disabilities are part of the fabric of this nation, and must be allowed to engage in civic activities such as voting. In order to do so, it is imperative that citizens with disabilities have access to the electoral process. The SILC believes that with tools such as HAVA (and other voting rights laws) and technological advances, all eligible persons can vote. Further, the SILC encourages the disability community to remind their county officials, the Washington Secretary of State, and the U.S. Department of Justice should there be barriers to this very important process.

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