



Statement to the
Election Reform Commission

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The Disability Law Center applauds efforts by the state to ensure that all citizens have the right to vote freely and independently.

The Disability Law Center, Utah's Protection and Advocacy Agency, has been instructed by the Federal Government to be an active partner in the implementation of the Help American Vote Act. Liz McCoy is a member of the Commission and a very valued member of our staff. We look forward to being a part of these important deliberations, and to working with the Commission to ensure that this most basic of our democratic rights is no longer denied any segment of our citizenry.

The DLC strives to be a consumer-driven organization. We recently surveyed people with disabilities to see what voting issues are most important to them. This small study found that their most important voting issue is the **physical access to polling places** (65%). Access to accessible electronic voting machines was the second most important thing (48%). Third most important was the lack of resources to answer questions in regards to voter registration and/or voting procedures (42%).

The DLC was proud to be a part of the legislative effort undertaken by then Lt Governor Walker to survey the state's polling places. The time has come to insist — from all sides — that those polling places which are inaccessible to people with physical disabilities be retrofitted or, if that is not possible, changed. Anything less is unacceptable.

With regard to the purchase of accessible electronic voting machines, our poll had a surprising result. Two thirds of these individuals with disabilities felt that it was **more important to wait to purchase the machines until concerns about security, reliability and accountability can be answered than to purchase one accessible voting machine per polling place by November's election**. We encourage the Commission to keep this in mind when deciding what kind of machine to purchase and when. We are committed, however, to the principle that all polling places have accessible machines by the 2006 election.

There are nearly 300,000 voting aged citizens with disabilities in the state of Utah. Estimates are that only half voted in the last general election. **We encourage the state to take aggressive means to ensure that people with disabilities are afforded the ability to register, and that all places required by the Motor Voter Act to register voters do so.**

The Disability Law Center has set a special Election Day hotline to respond to people with disabilities who feel they may have had their rights violated in the voting process. We will be working this spring and summer to remind individuals of their rights to an accessible polling place, and look forward to collaborating with other disability groups and the commission to ensure the 150,000 voices lost in the last election are at accessible polls, voting in the next election.