



U.S. ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION
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EAC Holds Public Hearing on Accessible Voting to Hear from Voters with Disabilities

BOSTON, MA – Members of the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) held a public hearing today to receive testimony from election administrators and voters with disabilities about accessible voting and the progress made since passage of the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). HAVA requires that individuals with disabilities be given the same opportunity to vote freely and independently as all other voters.

“The ability for voters to exercise their right to vote freely and independently regardless of ability is a core mission of the Election Assistance Commission. The testimony we heard today will help us to better serve voters by working with election officials across the country to improve access for voters with disabilities.” EAC Chairman Tom Hicks said.

Commissioners heard from state and local election officials in Massachusetts about improved voting accessibility through the introduction of online voter registration, new voting equipment and better training and deployment of election workers at polling places.

“As we are probing the new frontiers of empowering persons with disabilities participate in the election process, it was encouraging to have such a great turnout for today’s event,” said Secretary of the Commonwealth William F. Galvin, “I commend the Election Assistance Commission for bringing this hearing to Massachusetts to receive comments specific to the Commonwealth on the progress that has been made and the work that remains to be done.”

“With greater advances in technology and the availability of this technology in all aspects of our lives, providing resources to voters online is a priority,” Michelle K. Tassinari, Director of the State Elections Division told the hearing, “The Elections Division is committed to facilitating the accessibility and usability of our election resources websites for the disabled community.”

Commissioners also learned about the results of innovative initiatives funded through EAC’s College Pollworker grants, such as the Accessibility Ambassador Program. The program recruited and trained volunteer poll workers for the Boston Election Commission with a focus on understanding the needs of people with disabilities, and how poll workers could appropriately assist them.

“The ambassador program recognized that while accessible polling places and technological assistance were a step forward, we could go further in ensuring that voters with disabilities are able to exercise their right to vote in-person.” Dion Irish, Chairman of the Boston Election Commission testified. “The ambassador training focused on increasing the understanding of people with disabilities and how poll workers could appropriately assist them.” Irish added.

Commissioners heard from voters with disabilities from a number of states. The testimony focused on the progress made since HAVA as well as the need for continued improvement in accessible voting technology and poll worker training.

“Through advocacy and poll monitoring, we have seen tremendous gains in voting access in recent years, particularly in the realm of physical access. Although some challenges still remain, including in educating poll workers to properly assist voters with disabilities, great progress is being made. I appreciate the EAC’s attention to these important issues and the energy of so many organizations working together for the shared goal of equal access to voting,” said Allegra Stout, community organizer at the Boston Center for Independent Living.

EAC's hearing was held in conjunction with the Disability Law Center's REV UP conference. REV UP (Register, Educate and Vote), is a statewide effort that is part of a national non partisan campaign to get more people with disabilities registered to vote.

Today’s hearing is a follow-up to EAC’s [public meeting on July 28, 2015](#) to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and explore ways to make voting more accessible for individuals with disabilities. The Commission is also making resources available on its website for election officials to use to ensure polling places and other election services are accessible for voters with disabilities as part of its [#BeReady16 effort](#).

Presenters at today’s hearing included:

Opening Keynote

- Honorable William F. Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PANEL #1: Election Administrators

- Michelle Tassinari, Director and Legal Counsel for Secretary Galvin
- Dion Irish, Chairman, Boston Elections Commission
- Andrew Dowd, President, Massachusetts Clerks Association and Town Clerk, Town of Northborough, MA

PANEL #2: Advocates and Voters with Disabilities

- Dr. David Ticchi, Educator
- Allegra Stout, Community Organizer, Boston Center for Independent Living
- Anne Fracht, Chairperson, Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong (MASS)
- Ted Jackson, Community Organizing Director, California Foundation for Independent Living Centers
- Paul Spooner, Executive Director, Metro West Center for Independent Living, Inc.
- Linda Vaillancourt, President, Great Northwoods, New Hampshire Chapter, National Federation of the Blind.

For more information and to access the meeting agenda and webcast, visit [EAC.gov](#).

The EAC is an independent bipartisan commission created by the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) of 2002. HAVA was passed by the U.S. Congress to make sweeping reforms to the nation's voting process, address improvements to voting systems and voter access that were identified following the 2000 election, and to provide federal funding to states for new voting equipment. HAVA mandates that the EAC test and certify voting equipment, maintain the National Voter Registration form, conduct research, and administer a national clearinghouse on elections that includes shared practices, information for voters and other resources to improve elections. More information is available at [EAC.gov](#).