**The Experience of Blind and Visually Impaired Voters Who Used Online Ballot Delivery Systems during the November 2014 General Election**

**National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute**

**January 2015**

**Introduction**

An online ballot delivery system is a relatively new option that is available to voters with disabilities in some states that utilize vote-by-mail and in a few states as a tool for marking a paper absentee ballot. When designed in accordance with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, online ballot delivery systems allow voters with disabilities to mark and print their ballot privately and independently using their own assistive technology.

Following the November 4, 2014, elections, the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) conducted an online survey of blind, visually impaired, and deaf-blind voters, who used online ballot delivery systems to access and mark their ballot, to assess their voting experience. The survey was conducted with funding from a Help America Vote Act (HAVA) Training/Technical Assistance grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The survey was completed online using Survey Monkey evaluation software and was available from November 4 through November 25, 2014. A total of seven blind, visually impaired, and deaf-blind voters who used an online ballot delivery system to access and mark their ballot completed the survey. Participants in the survey were recruited through posts to the National Federation of the Blind members email list, posts to the National Federation of the Blind Facebook page and Twitter feed, and an announcement on the home page of the NFB's website.

**Survey Results**

Because the use of online ballot delivery systems is currently optional in the states that provide them, it is important to find out why voters use them. The majority of the voters surveyed (four) said they used an online ballot delivery system because they wanted to try it. One voter gave the reason that she was not able to use the mail-in ballot and one deaf-blind voter said she used the online ballot delivery system because the accessible voting machine at her polling place was not accessible to her. A voter in Oregon responded that he used the online ballot delivery system to mark his ballot for the November 2014 election because he had used it for prior elections.

All seven voters who completed the survey either agreed or strongly agreed that the online ballot delivery system was easy to use. According to one voter, "It was easy to vote using my own personal computer and screen access software preferences on my own time." A deaf-blind voter found that "I could read and understand who I was voting for with my Braille display."

A personal computer equipped with assistive technology was used by all seven voters to access and mark their ballot for the November 2014 election. All seven voters reported that the online ballot delivery system they used worked well with their computer system and assistive technology. Only minor problems, such as the return address not printing properly on the envelope, and one voter's screen reader saying "image of checked option," rather than simply saying "checked," were reported.

Six of the seven voters surveyed strongly agreed, and one voter agreed, that the online ballot delivery system made it easier for them to vote. One voter stated, "I did not have to deal with poll workers who do not know how to activate the audio ballot on the Diebold accessible voting machine." According to a deaf-blind voter, "I did not have to stress about trying to hear the ballot while in a noisy environment. Instead, I could [mark my ballot] in a quiet, comfortable place using my adaptive technology that I am familiar with, even though I do not consider myself to be a computer expert. It was simple and straightforward." In addition, all of the voters surveyed either strongly agreed or agreed that most people could learn to use the online ballot delivery system quickly.

The overall satisfaction level of the seven voters surveyed who used an online ballot delivery system was high. Five of the seven voters surveyed said that they were very satisfied with their experience using the online ballot delivery system, while the remaining two voters said they were satisfied with their experience. One voter found the system to be "extremely easy, convenient, and fully accessible." A second voter noted "the voting process itself was wonderful. I completed it in one-third the time as at the polling place." When asked if they would use the online ballot delivery system again in future elections, six of the voters said they were sure they would use it and one voter said they would probably use it.

**Conclusion**

When designed in accordance with the WCAG 2.0, accessible online ballot delivery systems are an easy, efficient, and convenient method for voters with disabilities to mark their ballot. For some deaf-blind voters, the use of an accessible online ballot delivery system is currently the only way they can mark their ballot privately and independently. However, less than half of the states in the United States currently utilize online ballot delivery systems, and only a handful of these states make their online ballot delivery system available to voters with disabilities. Voters with disabilities, particularly those with print disabilities, and disability rights advocates need to work with state election officials to expand the use of online ballot delivery systems and to increase their availability to voters with disabilities.