



NATIONAL FEDERATION
OF THE BLIND

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April 10, 2020

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren
Chairperson
Committee on House Administration
United States House of Representatives
1309 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rodney Davis
Ranking Member
Committee on House Administration
United States House of Representatives
1309 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairperson
Committee on Rules & Administration
United States Senate
305 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Amy Klobuchar
Ranking Member
Committee on Rules & Administration
United States Senate
305 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs Lofgren & Blunt, and Ranking Members Davis & Klobuchar:

The National Federation of the Blind urges that all absentee or vote by mail ballots used in federal elections be nonvisually accessible to blind voters and other voters with print disabilities.

Vote by mail legislation containing the principles of accessibility and universal design will strengthen and reinforce the existing constitutionally protected right of all Americans, including those with disabilities, to vote. There are three areas that must be addressed to ensure full accessibility for individuals with disabilities.

First, any legislation must guarantee the right of individuals with disabilities to cast a private and independent ballot. This includes both in-person voting and vote by mail and would ideally include strategies to reduce adversely long wait times at polling places and alternative options to casting a ballot on the day of an election, such as providing the option to cast a ballot outside of the polling place.

Second, the legislation must ensure that the process for requesting, filling out, and submitting a vote by mail ballot is nonvisually accessible. Ensuring the accessibility of vote by mail balloting will guarantee that all Americans are able to exercise their right to vote in a safe and secure manner without having to wait in long lines and crowded areas for extended periods of time.

National Federation of the Blind

Mark Riccobono, President | 200 East Wells Street at Jernigan Place Baltimore, MD 21230 | 410 659 9314 | www.nfb.org



Finally, the legislation must require the use of accessible and universally designed electronic ballot marking devices, and the education of state and local election officials in the secure use of those devices. The legislation should also require the opportunity to vote in person for those voters who prefer to use an accessible ballot marking device or who do not receive their ballot in the mail. We believe incorporation of these aspects into future legislation will ensure that an accessible means of voting for all individuals is achievable.

We recommend that the following provision is included in all legislation pertaining to federal elections: "All absentee or vote by mail ballots and related voting materials in elections for Federal office 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."

We believe that there is a balance to be struck that preserves the rights of blind and print-disabled voters while employing feasible and non-burdensome precautions. For these reasons, it is of the utmost importance that the above provision be included in any future legislation pertaining to the voting process. The United States is in unprecedented times, but that is no reason to abandon our values of liberty and equality for all Americans, especially in such a critically important process as federal elections. We thank you for leading this effort and championing the rights of people with disabilities. If the National Federation of the Blind can be of assistance in any way, especially by utilizing the nonvisual access to voting best practices and innovations we have developed over the past decades, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Mark A. Riccobono, President
National Federation of the Blind

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