



For Immediate Release

Contacts

Disability Rights New York: Katrin Haldeman, katrin.haldeman@drny.org, 518-512-4929

American Council of the Blind: Clark Rachfal, crachfal@acb.org, 202-467-5081

Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York: Jeff Peters, jpeters@cidny.org, 646-442-4154

Disability Rights Advocates: Christina Brandt-Young, cbrandt-young@dralegal.org, 212-644-8644

National Federation of the Blind: Chris Danielsen, cdanielsen@nfb.org, 410-262-1281

Agreement Made for June Accessible Absentee Voting Program

June 3, 2020 – New York, NY – A federal court has approved an agreement between the NYS Board of Elections (NYS BOE) and disability groups that provides voters a more accessible absentee ballot for the upcoming June 23 Primary Election. Following a lawsuit filed on May 22 by a disability rights coalition, the NYSBOE has agreed to email accessible absentee ballots to qualified voters with disabilities. Voters can access an Accessible Absentee Ballot Request Form on the NYS BOE website to request an accessible electronically-delivered absentee ballot.

The accessible absentee ballot request form is located here:

<https://www.elections.ny.gov/NYSBOE/download/Voting/NYAccessibleElectronicAbsBallotApp.pdf>.

“We are encouraged by the steps taken to ensure that people with disabilities have the opportunity to protect both their safety and their vote, via absentee ballot, in the upcoming June primary. However, there is still more to be done before the general election in November for the system to be fully accessible,” says the coalition, which includes Disability Rights New York, the American Council of the Blind—New York, Inc., Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York, Disability Rights Advocates, National Federation of the Blind of New York State, Inc., represented by Eve L. Hill of Brown of Goldstein & Levy LLP and several New York voters with disabilities, including Rasheta Bunting, Karen Gourgey, Keith Gurgui, and Jose Hernandez.

The terms of the agreement, which only applies to the June 23, 2020 Primary Election, include the following:

- 1) A voter with a print disability can request an accessible absentee ballot using the accessible request form available online.
- 2) The voter must send via email their completed request form to their county BOE on or before June 16. Voters can sign the form with text input or e-signature.



- 3) The county BOE will send the accessible absentee ballot to the voter by email as soon as possible after it receives the voter's request form. The county BOE also mails a postage paid return envelope and oath envelope to the voter.
- 4) The voter will receive an email with the accessible ballot, and the voter can mark their selections on the computer and print it out at home.
- 5) The voter must sign the oath envelope anywhere on the envelope, then put the ballot in the oath envelope. The voter must put the oath envelope in the larger envelope provided with paid postage by the county BOE. A voter must get the ballot in the mail by June 22, or hand-delivered it to the county BOE by June 23, 2020.

This agreement does not provide an online ballot submission option, and only applies to the upcoming June election. Plaintiffs will continue their pursuit for a fully accessible absentee ballot for the November 2020 General Election and all subsequent elections.

###

About American Council of the Blind (ACB): The American Council of the Blind is a national grassroots consumer organization representing Americans who are blind and visually impaired. With 70 affiliates, ACB strives to increase the independence, security, equality of opportunity, and to improve quality of life for all blind and visually impaired people. Learn more by visiting www.acb.org.

About Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY (CIDNY): The Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY's goal is to ensure full integration, independence, and equal opportunity for all people with disabilities by removing barriers to the social, economic, cultural, and civic life of the community. Learn more about our work at www.cidny.org.

About Disability Rights Advocates (DRA): Disability Rights Advocates is a leading national nonprofit disability rights legal center. Its mission is to advance equal rights and opportunity for people with all types of disabilities nationwide. DRA has a long history of enforcing the rights of voters with disabilities, including their rights to accessible voting machines, polling places, and online voter registration. Visit www.drlegal.org.

About Disability Rights New York (DRNY): DRNY is the designated independent non-profit Protection & Advocacy System empowered by Congress to investigate allegations of abuse and neglect and provide legal and non-legal advocacy services to people with disabilities in New York State. The Protection & Advocacy System was created by Congress as a direct result of the horrific conditions that were uncovered in the 1970's at New York's Willowbrook State School. DRNY is supported at tax payer expense by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, The Administration for Community Living; Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration; U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration; and, the Social Security Administration. This press release does not represent the views, positions or policies of, or the endorsements by, any of these federal agencies. Visit www.drny.org.

About National Federation of the Blind (NFB): The National Federation of the Blind, headquartered in Baltimore, is the oldest and largest nationwide organization of blind Americans. Founded in 1940, the NFB consists of affiliates, chapters, and divisions in the fifty states, Washington DC, and Puerto Rico. The NFB defends the rights of blind people of all ages and provides information and



support to families with blind children, older Americans who are losing vision, and more. We believe in the hopes and dreams of blind people and work together to transform them into reality. Learn more about our many programs and initiatives at www.nfb.org.