



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ohio Requires Accessible Absentee Ballots for the Blind

Directive Comes after Litigation brought by Blind Voters

Columbus, Ohio (March 26, 2018): Blind voters in Ohio must be able to cast absentee ballots privately and independently, according to a recent directive from Secretary of State John Husted.

The directive comes after the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit ruled that a lawsuit brought by the National Federation of the Blind and three blind voters could go forward. Plaintiffs were represented by Disability Rights Ohio and Brown, Goldstein & Levy, LLP. The suit sought a court order to require Husted's office to provide accessible ballot-marking solutions. The state had tried to have the lawsuit thrown out, arguing that accessible absentee ballots were not required by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Under the directive, the state's local boards of elections must make remote ballot-marking systems available to voters who are blind or who have other disabilities in time for the November 2018 election. These systems can be used alongside Braille or screen reader technology, which reads the text on a computer's screen as spoken words, to allow blind voters to mark their absentee ballots without assistance. The ballot can then be printed and mailed to the local board of elections, just like any other absentee ballot. The system will also benefit voters who are deaf-blind or who have other disabilities that prevent them from visiting a polling place or marking a traditional ballot.

"With these changes, I hope to finally be able to cast an absentee ballot by myself, without any help from a sighted friend or family member, thus maintaining confidentiality, and not have the worry of getting to a polling location, just like any other Ohio voter," said Shelbi Hindel, one of the three named plaintiffs on the lawsuit. "I hope that other people with disabilities across Ohio will take advantage of this important new option."

"Secretary Husted's decision to respect the rights of blind absentee voters instead of continuing to litigate the issue is a victory for the blind of Ohio and the nation," said Mark A. Riccobono, President of the National Federation of the Blind. "The kind of ballot-marking solution that the blind of Ohio requested has been successfully implemented in other states and will allow blind Ohioans to make their voting selections privately and independently. The National Federation of the Blind urges voting jurisdictions throughout the United States to adopt similar systems."

"Disability Rights Ohio is pleased that Secretary of State Husted is moving forward with creating a system that will give people with disabilities equal access to the polls," said Michael Kirkman, Executive Director of Disability Rights Ohio. "As the new system is rolled out across the state, we encourage anyone who has questions or problems to call us."

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About the National Federation of the Blind

The National Federation of the Blind (NFB), 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

About Disability Rights Ohio: Disability Rights Ohio is the federally and state designated Protection and Advocacy System and Client Assistance Program for the state of Ohio. The mission of Disability Rights Ohio is to advocate for the human, civil and legal rights of people with disabilities in Ohio. Disability Rights Ohio provides legal advocacy and rights protection to a wide range of people with disabilities. Find out more at disabilityrightsohio.org.

About Brown, Goldstein & Levy LLP: Brown, Goldstein & Levy, based in Baltimore, Maryland, handles both civil and criminal litigation and has long represented organizations and individuals with disabilities in high-profile, high-impact disability rights cases. For more information, visit www.browngold.com.

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