

hbundy@inclusionsolutions.com

Subject: February HAVAccess Archive

FEBRUARY 2003

LAUNCH ISSUE

HAVAccess

HAVAccess -- The election reform resource to help you address polling place access

Welcome

Welcome to *HAVAccess*, a free monthly newsletter developed by Inclusion Solutions to help election officials implement election reform measures -- specifically the accessibility provisions included in the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). This landmark legislation dramatically changes the election process, particularly for voters with disabilities.

Our goal is to be an educational resource, providing local election administrations with the necessary information and tools to ensure access for ALL voters. Look to *HAVAccess* for updates and analysis on accessibility provisions, funding guidelines, practical ways to increase accessibility, case studies, success stories and much more. Together, we can open the doors to our political system.

You are receiving this launch issue due to your role in election administration. If you don't wish to receive any further issues, follow the unsubscribe instructions at the bottom of this e-mail.

Access Is Critical Component Of Election Reform

After two years of discussion and debate, our nation is entering a new era for our electoral process. With the promise of solving the inherent problems that were so vividly played out in Florida's November 2000 Election, Congress and the President have enacted the Help America Vote Act. Furthermore, they have appropriated the funds to back implementation of the Act's many reform measures ranging from new voting equipment to the establishment of a Federal Election Assistance Commission. With an agreed upon national mission to improve our process and the funds in place to support state efforts, this landmark legislation will now come alive on a local level as election administrators put their plans in place to meet the comprehensive requirements laid out by Congress.

A major goal of the reform bill was to improve the process for voters with disabilities – a group cited to be 20% less likely to vote than the general population, largely in part to accessibility barriers. Therefore, in

Contents

[Access Is Critical Component Of Election Reform From My Perspective Accessibility Is Lynchpin To HAVA Funds](#)

From My Perspective...

Each month, *HAVAccess* will bring you the perspective of a voter with a disability, bringing to life the real barriers voters currently face when participating in our political process. We hope that as you implement changes to improve access at the polls, this column will transform to a collection of case studies highlighting innovative accessibility efforts and voting success stories.

Barriers

by Meghan Dee

I am an active, educated and involved member of my community and our political process, having worked for the past four years in both my state representative's and my state senator's offices. Despite my day-to-day involvement in the system and a promising career in government, you may be surprised to learn that I have not been able to independently vote.

You see, in addition to what I do and who I am, I also

establishing reform plans, one of the greatest challenges and most critical tasks will be to ensure the accessibility of our nation's polling places and the fundamental rights of voters with disabilities.

Enhancing voting for persons with disabilities requires election officials to address two critical components: 1) Implementation of accessible voting equipment, and 2) The physical accessibility of polling places.

Voting Equipment:

To date, much attention has been given to voting equipment as the key enabler for people with disabilities to cast their ballot and participate equally in our political process. HAVA requires that every precinct across the nation have at least one voting machine or system that is accessible to individuals with disabilities by January 1, 2006. Many of the new electronic machines (DREs) are designed to meet these accessibility requirements. When evaluating new machines for purposes of the accessibility provisions, factors to consider include whether the system allows visually impaired voters to vote in privacy and without the aid of others, the ability of the system to be used by voters with limited manual dexterity, and in states which allow curbside voting, the system should be portable and possible to bring out to a voter either outside or in his/her vehicle.

While the implementation of accessible voting equipment is a very important step, it will do little good if a voter does not have a barrier free route to reach the equipment, bringing us to an often overlooked priority.

Polling Place Accessibility:

The actual physical accessibility of polling places is the second key issue, one that will be the emphasis of HAVAccess moving forward. While the Help America Vote Act is not precise as to the requirements for polling place accessibility, the issue is undoubtedly central to the reform package, and a key requirement for the procurement of Federal funds.

After the GAO's startling 2002 report which concluded 67% of all polling centers in the 2000 election had some major impediment to voters with disabilities, the legislative debate over H.R. 3295 discussed at great length the need for polling places to be made accessible to voters with disabilities. Although the text of the final Act does not explicitly set standards for accessibility, its incorporation of other laws and funding provisions will in practice mandate accessibility improvements. Section 906 of the Act reaffirms the applicability of prior

happen to I travel in a manual wheelchair. When I go to vote, I am faced with a host of barriers -- a hard to manage curb in the parking lot, a step with an uneven rise at the doorway, a heavy door. Before ever reaching my ballot, I've completed a juggling act to hold the door open, pull the chair, and maneuver the doorway.

These problems were all at the location where I first voted, requiring me to bring along my father in order to cast my vote. I have since moved away from this precinct, but the problem of access is still unsatisfactory at a majority of polling places, causing the elderly and disabled to struggle, in many cases deterring them from voting altogether. As defined in the constitution, ALL citizens have the inalienable right to participate in the election process. Steps and heavy, non-electric doors should not rob us of that privilege.

My wheelchair may limit me physically; however, it will not limit my rights or the pride I feel in going to my election precinct to vote. I dream of the day when the accessibility issue no longer exists and that voters with disabilities can equally participate, casting their vote in a dignified, independent manner.

When the Help America Vote Act was passed this fall, I was ecstatic. The law is an exciting first step toward achieving my dream. I ask that you take a

legislation requiring accessibility, including the 1990 Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), and the 1984 Voting for the Elderly and Handicapped Act (VAEHA). Election officials seeking guidance on the issue should look to the standards put in place under these two laws as a measure by which to certify their accessibility. It is also important to take specific state requirements into account, such as a prohibition on curbside voting.

Other provisions possibly impacting access include the Act's enforcement provisions under which the DOJ will have the authority to seek relief for violations of HAVA and new state-based administrative complaint procedures to remedy grievances. It is also possible that the new Election Assistance Commission may eventually set national standards for polling place accessibility.

In the issues to come, *HAVAccess* will explore access guidelines in detail, helping you to ensure a barrier free experience for all voters.

1.5 Billion Allocated To Help States Meet HAVA Standards In 2003

Accessibility Is Lynchpin To Funds

In it's largest appropriations bill ever, Congress recently approved a \$397.4 billion spending package for fiscal 2003, including \$1.5 billion to help States meet new standards under the Help America Vote Act. The Election Reform package includes over \$1.4 billion in direct assistance for the improvement of elections, from administration and new equipment, to educational programs and safeguards.

Accessibility is at the core of funding and is a requirement for states as they line up to get their share of Federal dollars. To encourage compliance with existing accessibility standards, the bill requires State election officials to certify that their state is in compliance with laws including the ADA and the VAEHA. Thus, polling place accessibility is a crucial element in the reform process and is a key to the funds necessary for reform implementation.

To help states meet these crucial accessibility requirements, The Federal government has also allocated specific funds to help states achieve site accessibility. The bill allocates \$100 million to be used for making polling places, including the path of travel, entrances, exits and voting areas of each polling facility, accessible to individuals with disabilities. Additional allocations also impact polling place access, such as \$40 million earmarked to improve state

leadership stance in the implementation of this historic legislation and open your doors to all voters. You may be surprised by the impact of an accessible vote.

Inclusion Solutions Is Working To Shape The Future Of Accessible Voting

Inclusion Solutions is dedicated to working with election officials to solve polling place access. Our goal is to balance the realities and challenges faced by election officials with the access needs and rights of citizens with disabilities.

We'd love to hear your thoughts on the issue. What are your plans for achieving accessibility? How are you responding to HAVA at the local level? Share your ideas and thoughts with our readers. Or, if you have an idea that you would like to see discussed in an upcoming issue of *HAVAccess*, let us know.

Contact us toll free at 866-232-5487, or [e-mail us](#).

Subscribe

If you liked this *HAVAccess* [click here to forward it to your colleagues](#).

New readers, [sign up here](#).

>> Next Month's HAVAccess:

The True State of Access At the Polls: A Look Inside the Realities Of Polling Place Accessibility

Plus:

- Tips for Evaluating and Improving Access
- Securing Election Reform Funding; What You Need To

protection and advocacy systems to help assist people with disabilities in participating in the electoral process. \$20 million for pilot programs and \$650 million in general funds may also be used for the purpose of ensuring accessibility of polling places. In order to access these funds, election officials will need to make an application to the Office of Disability of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Know

In addition to funds appropriated for 2003, the Election Assistance Commission is scheduled to distribute \$1 billion in 2004 and \$600 million in 2005 as a reimbursement for costs incurred obtaining new voting equipment. Another \$650 million will be available in a general funds provision.

*HAVA*Access will continue to provide funding updates and tips for implementing the accessibility standards necessary to be eligible for such grants.

Inclusion Solutions© 2003. All rights reserved.
[Privacy Policy](#)

www.InclusionSolutions.com

Cancel my subscription [click here](#). Or reply to this message with the word unsubscribe in the subject line.