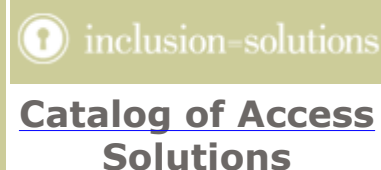


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From: Inclusion Solutions (Hollister Bundy) [hbundy@inclusionsolutions.com]
Sent: Monday, January 26, 2004 12:00 PM
To: hbundy@inclusionsolutions.com
Subject: Polling Place Access (January HAVAccess)

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Accessible Polling Places

This is the eighth issue -- and first of 2004 of *HAVAccess*, Inclusion Solutions' free newsletter to help election officials implement HAVA's disability access provisions. As we move into a new year, new funding and the long-awaited funnelling of Section 261 grants portend that 2004 will be a crucial year for election access for voters with disabilities.

Newsbrief: 2004 -- Additional Funds and Tight Deadlines

With the 2004 election season upon us, some officials are struggling with implementing the many reforms required by HAVA. Recent developments are positive both in terms of funding and concerning increased emphasis on accessibility.

On January 22, the Senate passed HR 2673, an omnibus appropriations bill that contains \$1.5 billion to fund HAVA election reforms. This appropriation level -- a larger amount than originally wanted by President Bush -- is a victory for advocates of election reform. However, unlike last year, the appropriations have not been divided up into their component parts and thus it is uncertain how much of these funds will be earmarked for polling place accessibility and other HAVA requirements. Several sources indicated that they were uncertain yet how these funds will be divided up.

It should be noted, however, that many of the accessibility provisions of HAVA were underfunded worse than most sections of the law last year. Of the \$50 million originally allocated for polling place accessibility, only \$13 million was allocated -- or about 26% of that authorized (as opposed to the 76% funding level for 2003 HAVA as a whole). Similar cuts affected payments to state protection and advocacy agencies. Many disability rights advocates and election officials are hopeful that these crucial provisions of the law will be better funded in 2004.

Another positive development in terms of HAVA reforms is the long-awaited nomination of members of the Election Assistance Commission. These developments suggest that 2004 will see an acceleration of the process. Accessibility of polling places is no exception and is one of the areas that officials will need to deal with. Many are planning or conducting surveys of polling places

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From My Perspective...

Steve Handschu is a nationally renowned sculptor. He is also a Director of the Illinois Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind. He is a member of the Illinois HAVA team, the Chicago Accessibility Task Force and a leading advocate of accessible voting machines.

I am passionate about voting. In spite of my increasing disappointment with the choices we are forced to make, the general cynicism surrounding the voting process and the confused anxiety which I, a registered voter, 56, male and blind, cause election officials, as soon as I enter the poling place, I remain passionate about voting!

I remember people dying to achieve, "one person one vote", in secret and safety; for all of us. I take it seriously. Depending on your level of frustration, voting is either the way you make the system work, or the proof that it doesn't work. It is one of the only truly "universal rights" we have. So the degree to which we are able to vote, with the same degree of ease and privacy as everyone else, becomes a measure of our acceptance by the world in which we live. No wonder we all get a little jumpy about voting.

Like most blind people I have no need of systemic or architectural modifications to

now or in 2004 elections with improvements to be made before the 2004 general election.

Newsbrief: Other Accessibility-Related Stories

[Kansas to Reduce Polling Places to Meet Access Requirements](#)

[DOJ to Enforce Accessible Voting Machine Rules](#)

[New York Disabled Voters Want Independence at Polls](#)

Indiana Access: The Count us in Project

As states look to address polling place access on a statewide level, they can look no further than the combined efforts of Indiana's innovative "Count Us In" project and the proactive efforts of the State Department of Elections as a model for addressing access to polling places.

Count Us In is a project sponsored by the Indiana Governor's Planning Council on Disability and is committed to ensuring the accessibility of the electoral process for voters with disabilities. Among their efforts are a statewide voter registration project and a get out the vote initiative.

But where Count Us In really shines is their efforts to survey polling places for accessibility. In November, 2003, they orchestrated disability advocates and rights groups with election officials to survey 511 of polling places throughout Marion County, Indiana (Indianapolis). Count Us In developed a survey for accessibility, put together a program for surveying the sites, and brought in 57 people to evaluate polling places. They provided these volunteers with training about surveying the polling places and sent them out on election day. A report of access concerns is then sent to the county.

What is so innovative about these surveys is that Count Us In succeeded in bringing election officials and disability rights advocates together for the surveys. Vaughn and coordinators went to Centers for Independent Living, (disability rights and living centers throughout the state), to recruit volunteers to do the surveys. Surveyors are paid a small amount per polling site, but many were interested in participating merely in order to ensure access. As a result of the participation of advocates, polling sites were evaluated objectively and fairly.

The program was such a success, that during the May, 2004, Indiana primary and again during the general election in November, Count Us In will be orchestrating a similar survey throughout Indiana. They are in the process of recruiting advocates and others statewide to accomplish it.

Count Us In's Effort's are particularly impressive given Indiana's statewide leadership on polling place accessibility. The Indiana State Department of Elections has also made polling place accessibility a high priority through an innovative concept linking funding for new machines with accessible locations.

State co-director of Elections Kristi Robertson has told local election officials that, before they can receive funding for new voting machines, they must certify that their polling places are accessible to voters with disabilities -- linking these two issues ensures that not only will every polling place have an accessible DRE, but that all voters will be able to get to these accessible voting machines, and positions Indiana as a leader on the issue. [See Access Requirements on pages 8-9 of state voting reimbursement form.](#)

Vaughn expressed her satisfaction at the combined efforts of the Count Us In project and the state board of elections: "We are pleased at how the Indiana state HAVA implementation team has embraced the idea that people with disabilities must be full

find, enter and move freely through polling places as they are. Since the entire voting process is visual, I have up until now, had to rely on sighted people in order to vote.

The first time I tried to vote I tried to use several "different low vision devices" to read the ballot. This didn't work for me and are unlikely to work for many other blind people. Although such aids are often quite useful, they require near perfect conditions and their use is very slow when they do work.

I needed to get help from a sighted person to read the ballot to me and enter my choices. But I didn't know any of the poll watchers. How could I trust them to read the ballot and cast my vote accurately? They didn't trust each other. They were worried that if some one from another party helped me that that person would take advantage of me and cast my vote as if it were there own. After long negotiations I was allowed to vote with the assistance of two poll watchers from opposing parties. The theory being that their biases would cancel each others out and give me a shot at honesty. Although I didn't know it, many blind people had been voting this way for years. I left with considerable doubt about the vote I had just cast and deeply humiliated. My vote was not my own. It wasn't private. Worse it was subject to the good will of others.

In 1974 I met and became active in the National Federation of the Blind. No longer alone, I was able to learn from other blind people and work collectively with them to improve things. By the eighties we had won state laws that allowed us to vote using the system described above, with the help of a sighted person of our choice or by absentee ballot. This is fine if you have some one who you are willing to trust with your vote; do you?

Today there are voting machines with audible speech output and prompted controls that we can use with complete independence and privacy. The "Help America Vote Act" promises at least one such machine at each polling place. We are so close. Now, only funding sufficient to purchase accessible machines and good judgment as to which machine to purchase stand between us and our full enfranchisement.

We want to work with you to get full funding. For more information please contact Jim McCarthy at the address and phone shown below. We can help you find the right machine. Hundreds of blind people test voting machines to determine their accessibility. To find out which one will work in the real world call your local advocates or contact Steven Booth at address and phone shown below:

The National Center for the Blind
1800 Johnson St.
Baltimore Maryland 21230.
Tel. 410-659-9314

participants in the electoral process."

Count Us In and the Indiana State Board of Elections set a pragmatic and effective model for other states for polling place accessibility. Count Us In Project Director Julia Vaughn can be reached at 317-234-2226 or CountUsIN@gpcpd.org.

[Indiana's Count Us In Voting Project](#)

Parking and Lots: The Basics

A challenging accessibility issue for many election officials are parking spaces, and outside path of travel. These issues can be difficult to understand and sometimes problematic to solve.

The scope of the problem is significant. The General Accounting Office Report on polling place accessibility found that 57% of all sites surveyed on election day had some access barrier concerning parking or path of travel.

[Parking](#)

Particularly for jurisdictions in heavily populated locations, parking is an access challenge. In locations such as cities, there may not be adequate parking for many polling places, making the designation of an accessible spot difficult. In other cases, there may only be street parking without any accessible sports proximate to the polling place. The GAO found that 32% of all polling places lacked designated accessible parking.

Election officials are required to provide at least one van accessible parking place at every location under the Americans With Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG). A van-accessible space is one that not only allows a vehicle to park, but which also includes an abutting space to allow, for example, a voter in a wheelchair to unload from his or her vehicle. This access aisle should have a width of 96". See [U.S. DOJ Regulations](#) for more information.

Parking spaces must also be designated with appropriate signage at a height that someone driving into the space can see it. Ideally, sites should already have permanent signage conforming to state laws, as such laws on accessible parking signage vary. However, temporary signage and/or cones may be used as an alternative for election day.

[Unpaved Lots](#)

Election officials in less heavily populated or more rural regions more frequently face a different issue, unpaved parking lots.

Parking lots of gravel, sand, grass, or other porous materials can prove a great challenge to voters with mobility disabilities such as wheelchair, scooter, or walker users. The GAO report found 23% of sites had unpaved or poorly paved parking lots.

The ideal solution, of course, is to use polling places that have paved parking lots without cracks or other obstructions. Election officials can also have parking lots paved when necessary. Unfortunately, there often only limited choices for polling sites and many officials are reluctant to incur the large cost of paving lots. Compounding the problem is that many sites are privately owned (churches, private homes, etc.) and are either not covered by the ADA, or are sites such that election officials are also reluctant (or prohibited from) expending public funds on private facilities. Many officials have expressed serious reluctance to spend precious resources on paving facilities that they do not own and which may or may not be used as polling places in the future.

Harry Sawyer, director of elections in Monroe County Florida, relates problems typical to many jurisdictions. Parking lots throughout his region in the Florida Keys are gravel or ground coral - and paving these lots - many of which are in private

Stephen M Handschu

SHARE YOUR STORY

We are always looking for advocates and people with disabilities to share their stories about access to polling places. If you or someone you know is interested in writing a "From My Perspective" article or sharing an anecdote, please give us a call at 1-866-232-5487 or email us at havaccess@inclusionsolutions.com.

Inclusion Solutions: Solving Access Issues

Inclusion Solutions continues to work with state and local election officials, as well as P&As and other advocates to solve polling place access. Please call us for free information and evaluation.

DOWNLOADABLE GOODIES:

[Catalog of Access Products](#)
[Door Hardware Evaluation Tool](#)

Past Issues & Correction: The last issue of HAVAccess had incorrect links for 2 back issues of HAVAccess, for May Funding and June -- below are correct links for all issues:

[Vol I. Issue 1 February 2003](#)

[Vol I. Issue 2 May 2003](#)

[Vol I. Issue 3 Special Funding Update May 2003](#)

[Vol I. Issue 4 June 2003](#)

[Vol I. Issue 5 September 2003](#)

[Vol I. Issue 6 November 2003](#)

For past issues with the original formatting and operating links, please email elections@inclusionsolutions.com or call us toll free at 1-866-232-5487.

We carry BallotCall, portable ramps of all sizes for your inaccessible locations, parking lot and other signage, roll-over matting (for gravel, grass lots), interior access kits with magnifiers and hearing aids, accessible voting booths and consulting/surveying services.
OUR SOLUTIONS ARE AFFORDABLE USES OF HHS FUNDS

facilities - is not something that his department can afford.

One solution, where permissible, is to use curbside voting for these voters. However, it is imperative that if curbside voting is to be used that there be some means for voters encountering these access barriers to notify officials of their intent to vote (such as an official stationed outside or the BallotCall unit.)

Another solution to this problem is temporary matting. [AccessMat](#) can be unrolled and placed down on gravel, grass, or sand surfaces to make them accessible to wheelchairs. The matting, originally developed for boat ramps and military applications, is lightweight, easily set up, and passes all federal standards for accessibility and weight tolerances. Best of all, it can be stored and kept by election officials and brought out on election day - keeping the power of accessibility in the hands of the election officials.

Path of Travel

Finally, even where parking lots are adequate and paved, there still must not be any access barriers between the parking and the front door. Curbs, narrow pathways, steep ramps and other barriers still can impede access. Signage can be posted directing voters to an accessible route, or barriers can be removed by installing accessible paths and using portable ramps to ensure a path of travel to the polling place entrance.

Inclusion Solutions (and our distributor [Printelect](#)) are dealers for temporary parking signage, portable ramps and AccessMats. Please call us at 1-866-232-5487 or email us at parking@inclusionsolutions.com for more information.

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