

**Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities  
Legislative and Budget Subcommittee  
Meeting Minutes**

Date of meeting: Monday, July 8, 2024

Start time: 12:00pm

Location: Virtual Meeting (Zoom)

Members Participating Remotely	
1	Carl Richardson – ADA Coordinator, Massachusetts State House
2	Charlie Carr – Legislative Liaison, Disability Policy Consortium
3	Chris White – CEO & President, Road to Responsibility, Inc.
Members Absent	
4	Meghan Todd – Grants Manager, City of Framingham

Action Items		Person Responsible
1	Reach out to Disability Policy Consortium regarding Health Equity	Charlie Carr
2	Coordinate with Co-Chair Senator Kennedy and Rep. Livingstone regarding Disability Caucus	All

**Meeting Notes Summary:**

**1. Welcome, Roll Call, Approval of May Minutes:**

- The May meeting minutes were unanimously approved.

**2. Guest Speakers: Barbara L'Italien, Tatum Pritchard, and Rick Glassman from the Disability Law Center (DLC) on Voting Access for Individuals with Disabilities:**

- **Accessible Voting:**
  - Massachusetts now offers the most accessible remote voting system in the nation, allowing all voters, including those with disabilities, to vote by mail.
  - Thanks to advocacy by DLC and partners, voters with disabilities can use assistive technology to vote electronically via platforms like Democracy Live, which has been positively received.
  - Voters who encounter issues at the polls can access emergency absentee ballots, with similar accommodations available for those who cannot use standard print ballots.

**Question:** How many states currently offer electronic voting?

- Answer: The number is still in the minority, though Massachusetts has been a leader in implementing electronic voting for federal elections.

**Question:** If I currently vote by absentee ballot but want to switch to electronic voting, how do I do that?

- Answer: Contact your local election official or apply online through the Secretary of State's accessible form to receive accommodations for accessible remote voting.

**Question:** If I opt for electronic remote voting but decide to go to the polls, what happens?

- Answer: You are still able to vote in person at the polls.
- **Polling Place Accessibility:**
  - The aging Automark machines in polling sites need replacement, and there is concern about maintaining uniformity in the new equipment across municipalities.
  - DLC is advocating for standardized voting equipment and ballot design statewide to ensure accessibility and consistency.
  - The DLC and BSCB are assessing potential replacement models and pushing for uniformity across the state.
  - An [online accessibility survey](#) has been created to gather information on accessibility issues at polling locations.

**Question:** Does the DLC recommend a specific voting device?

- Answer: While DLC evaluated devices from three manufacturers, Democracy Live stood out as the most user-friendly transition for voters familiar with Automark.
- **Legislative Advocacy:**
  - DLC supports legislation (House 701, Senate 2799) to shift the responsibility of auditing polling place accessibility to the Secretary of State's office, requiring audits every four years.
  - Despite federal and state accessibility laws, enforcement remains insufficient, which this legislation aims to address.

**Question:** Aren't there already federal regulations on accessibility?

- Answer: Yes, but there is insufficient oversight, and this legislation seeks to ensure proactive enforcement and accountability.
- **Remote Participation in Local Government:**
  - The shift to remote public hearings during COVID-19 increased accessibility, but many municipalities are reverting to in-person meetings. Efforts are ongoing to maintain hybrid options for continued participation by people with disabilities and others facing barriers.

- BCIL, along with Common Cause and other organizations, is advocating for House Bill H 4771, which promotes universal design and broader participation in local government, benefiting people with disabilities, those with childcare responsibilities, and others.

#### Next Meeting Dates

- 8/26/24 at 11am
- 11/18/24 at 11am