

Testimony from Dan Kysor of the California Council of the Blind
Chairman Perez and members of the board:

Envision, if you will, a system under which every voter was forced to have someone else fill out his or her ballot, be it a spouse or significant other, a friend or a precinct worker. A shocking thought, and yet that is exactly the system under which tens of thousands of blind and visually impaired Californians have had to live. This board, however, can take a large step forward to putting an end to this horrendous situation.

As Governmental Affairs Director for the California Council of the Blind, the largest consumer organization of blind and visually impaired individuals in the state, I can tell you that our members are truly excited about the possibilities of the use of accessible voting equipment throughout the state. We hope that your actions will begin to turn our hopes into reality.

Using readily available technology, DRE systems are being adapted in numerous locations throughout the nation, so as to permit blind and visually impaired individuals to vote privately and independently. In fact, several California counties, including Los Angeles and Alameda, appear committed to do what they can to ensure that accessible voting systems become a reality for those of us with visual impairments. Those individuals with visual impairments who were fortunate enough to vote using accessible voting equipment that was placed in a limited number of locations in Los Angeles and Alameda counties during the 2000 general election were thrilled at their first experience with voting without assistance. We also applaud the efforts of Secretary of State Jones to publicize the availability of accessible voting systems, work with vendors of these systems, and obtain input from those with visual impairments on such equipment.

An important issue for everyone involved in the election reform process is, of course, cost. However, the cost of making direct record equipment systems accessible is, depending upon the system used, as low as \$200 per unit. It is our ultimate goal that every precinct in the state have one accessible voting machine for those of us with visual impairments. A minimal cost, such as this, is a small price to pay to ensure that the most important civil right held by citizens of our democracy is guaranteed.

Voting equipment that is accessible to those with visual impairments can also be used by those with a variety of other disabilities, including those with learning disabilities, the largest group of disabled persons in the state. Thus, this equipment will do far more than merely benefit the blind and visually impaired.

What can you, the Voting Modernization Board, do? It is our hope that, as a condition of the receipt of bond funds, the board will require that a county commit to making one precinct accessible to persons with visual impairments. The blind and visually impaired, like all voters, should be able to vote in their own neighborhoods. This ability is even more important for those of us with visual impairments, given our lack of ability to drive.

On behalf of the California Council of the Blind, and all persons with visual impairments in California, I thank the board for this opportunity to come before you. California has always prided itself on being a leader. I urge the board to continue this trend by ensuring that all

Californians with visual impairments can vote in a private and independent manner.