



## **Independent Living Center of Kern County**

A Non-Profit Agency - Encouraging and Empowering Persons with Disabilities Since 1981

June 21, 2002

Honorable John A. Perez  
Chairman  
Voting Modernization Board  
C/o Office of the California Security of State  
1500 11<sup>th</sup> Street, room #590  
Sacramento, CA. 95814

Re: Equal voting opportunities for persons with disabilities

Honorable Chairman Perez and Members of the Voting Modernization Board:

I am writing on behalf of Kern County voters with disabilities who do not currently have equal access to polling sites and voting equipment. It is my function to help create changes in my community that will empower persons with disabilities to exercise their right to be full members of our society. Voting, and the right to vote oneself by secret ballot, has always been the optimum standard for voting in our country.

Moreover, it is a right guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment of our Constitution and a variety of other Federal statutes, including the Voting Access for the Elderly and Handicapped Act, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans With Disabilities Act.

As a person with a disability I have never had the opportunity to vote by secret ballot as others do. As a working taxpayer with strong political views I am disheartened with each and every election wherein I and 40,000 others with disabilities in Kern County endure a lack of accessible voting equipment and private voting space.

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During the last county-wide election the ILCKC staff and volunteers conducted a survey of approximately one quarter of our 342 total polling sites. We found that while some were accessible to persons with mobility impairments, none were equipped with accessible voting machines. Additionally the voting machines in use that could potentially be accessible to those in wheelchairs were not set up in a manner that would allow them to be properly utilized or to facilitate privacy.

Currently available cost effective technology that would allow persons with disabilities to be fully included in the voting process as guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. The demonstration models of accessible voting machines that I have tried are user friendly and accessible to persons with a variety of impairments. These assistive devices allow people to vote independently and privately. However, the mere existence of these accessible voting machines means nothing without the mandated implementation of their use.

We urge you to address the needs of millions of California voters currently being denied equal access to the voting process by providing communities with funds for, and mandated purchase of, accessible voting equipment.

Respectfully,



Leanne Atkison  
Systems Change Advocate



Bonita Coyle  
Executive Director