

**TrueVoteMD.org**  
**Policy Regarding Voting Accessibility for Those Who are  
Blind and Who Speak Alternative Languages**

TrueVoteMD fully supports an accessible, verifiable audit trail system for all of Maryland's voters, including those who are blind and partially sighted, as well as those who speak languages other than English. We acknowledge and respect the right of people with disabilities to cast a private, unassisted vote. We also believe that they, as well as those who speak alternative languages, deserve the same right as others to verify that the permanent record of their ballot correctly reflects their intent and that it will be preserved for future audit and recount purposes.

The National Federation for the Blind (NFB) and American Association of Persons with Disabilities (AAPD) claim that the use of paper ballots along with touch-screen voting machines (also known as direct recording electronic (DRE) machines) would be discriminatory since voters who are blind couldn't read them. They also claim that instituting a paper audit trail will delay the purchase and implementation of these machines which allow those who are blind and partially sighted to vote independently in private.

We believe these concerns are misplaced for several reasons:

(1) It is technologically feasible to attach audio read-back devices to the touch-screen machine paper printers that TrueVoteMD advocates for producing a paper audit trail. Several touch-screen manufacturers are currently developing such audio devices, similar to the devices used to make the touch-screens accessible. The state of California is requiring that its DRE manufacturers provide paper audit trail systems with accessible features. TrueVoteMD believes that Maryland officials should adopt the same requirements!

(2) Touch-screen machines do not provide the only accessible voting equipment for people with disabilities. Several devices have been developed for optical scan voting machines that make them accessible to those who are blind and partially sighted.

(3) Paperless electronic voting jeopardizes the integrity of all votes because it prohibits any voter, with or without disabilities, from verifying that his/her vote was accurately recorded. In addition, such systems do not provide a way to conduct an audit or recount.

Other disability rights organizations disagree with the stand of the NFB and AAPD. In September 2004, Bob Kerr, President of the Southern Maryland Council of the Blind, asked TrueVoteMD to post the following statement on its website:

As President of the Southern Maryland Council of the Blind, I would like to state our position in respect to the editorial which appeared in the June 11 edition of the New York Times and that is posted on your website. The SMCB is a local

chapter of the American Council of the Blind, which is the nation's leading advocacy organization for blind and visually impaired people.

The Diebold AccuVote-TS is one of a handful of voting machines that meet the accessibility requirements set fourth in the Help America Vote Act. These machines enable blind and visually impaired voters to vote independently by secret ballot. This is accomplished through either a magnified display or audio output heard over headphones. For blind and sighted voters alike, the AccuVote-TS eliminates the ballot legibility and over-voting problems associated with paper ballots.

Unlike other blindness groups, the SMCB is not opposed to the use of voter verifiable paper ballots in conjunction with electronic voting systems as long as such ballots are accessible and remain at the polling place. Indeed, a paper verification ballot could readily be made accessible, through bar coding or other optical technologies. Although our organization is conducting a demonstration project through an arrangement with Diebold, we do not endorse their equipment nor have we been offered any payment to do so. Like most blind voters, we at the SMCB believe that the election process must be accurate and verifiable while ensuring the right to a secret ballot.

Robert A. Kerr, President  
Southern Maryland Council of the Blind  
September 29, 2004

Another disability rights organization, Lighthouse International, had the following letter published in the New York Times in response to the controversy surrounding the NFB's and AAPD's close association with several touch-screen manufacturers, especially Diebold, which supplies Maryland's touch-screen machines:

A Verifiable, Accessible Vote

To the Editor:

Re "The Disability Lobby and Voting" (editorial, "Making Votes Count" series, June 11):

You say "disability-rights groups have been clouding the voting machine debate by suggesting that the nation must choose between accessible voting and verifiable voting."

Lighthouse International, New York City's oldest and largest vision rehabilitation agency serving people of all ages who are blind and partially sighted, sees no contradiction between accessible voting and verifiable voting for all Americans.

We support both concepts in the interest of fair elections.

BARBARA SILVERSTONE  
Chief Exec., Lighthouse International  
New York, June 11, 2004

We would like to work with disability rights organizations to ensure that whatever paper audit trail system is adopted in Maryland will be accessible and user-friendly. We encourage those interested in such an outcome to join us in pressing touch-screen machine manufacturers to develop a stand-alone, audio read-back system for AVVPAT paper printers. Together we can ensure that people with disabilities receive equal access to averifiable vote, as intended under the Help America Vote Act (HAVA).

Everyone's "true vote" should be counted!

Contact Shelley Fudge of [TrueVoteMD.org](http://TrueVoteMD.org) at 301-588-3835 for more information.