

April 27, 2016

Commissioner Thomas Hicks, Chair
Commissioner Matthew Masterson
Commissioner Christy A. McCormick
United States Election Assistance Commission
1335 East West Highway, Suite 4300
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Chairman Hicks and Commissioners,

Greetings and my thanks for taking testimony at today's hearing on accessible voting. While I regret that I cannot be there today, please accept this letter as testimony on this subject.

It has recently come to the attention of my Office that there are certain persons with disabilities for whom voting is not yet fully accessible. I refer to sighted persons who are, for whatever reason, unable to read. These adults who are "pre-readers" have partial accessibility to the ballot with current equipment, but there can be gaps in current technology that render it more difficult for them to understand the ballot and cast a meaningful vote.

These gaps are:

- 1) While audio programs designed to communicate the written words on ballots are already in place on assistive voting technology, those audio programs are not required by EAC guidelines to articulate and pronounce each word on the ballot as it appears on that ballot. When confronted with a word on the ballot that has not previously been programmed, the audio programs spell out the word. While this is better than taking no action and while this may be sufficient for voters with certain disabilities, this is unhelpful to pre-readers, as their disability is such that they cannot spell, so spelling out the word does not convey the needed information. It would be useful if the next iteration of the VVSG or similar regulations would require that the machine read all ballot language instead of accepting an audio program that spells out any word.
- 2) Similarly, audio programs are not required to read punctuation marks on the ballot. Pre-readers have indicated to us that reading those marks would be desirable. Thus, the name of candidate Larry "Bud" Melman, would be read out as Larry Quote Bud End-quote Melman. This could also be addressed in the VVSG process. It should be noted that differently disabled persons appear to have different preferences on whether punctuation should be read and so, while I am not advocating a change on this front, I wanted to relay to you the feedback that was expressed to my Office.
- 3) Finally, pre-readers have indicated to us that it would be useful for the Commission to require that all voting equipment allow for the use of external keyboards, as this is a convenience for persons in this class of voters. Pre-readers are familiar with using keyboards to translate written text into audio through their use of screen readers on computers.

Thank you for your consideration. If your technical staff has or is aware of suggestions or solutions for these issues, I would be glad to hear from them with that information.

Best regards,

Steve Simon
Secretary of State of Minnesota