On May 20, 2016, the Michigan Bureau of Elections (BOE) hosted a mock election in East Lansing, MI. The State of Michigan is currently in the process of replacing its existing voting system, which is over 10 years old. Michigan Protection & Advocacy Service, Inc. (MPAS) attended the event to provide feedback and help ensure the new technology is accessible.

Recently, the BOE conducted a voting machine bid, where multiple vendor systems were tested. Under Michigan law, the BOE is required to conduct a mock election, with each vendor allowing voters and poll workers to test each voting machine. The structured ballot testing process must meet all state laws and be accessible to everyone, especially those with a disability.

The mock election was designed to mirror a real voting experience. Local clerks and poll workers were on hand to offer assistance to those testing the machines, which were equipped with different accessibility features. Testers received a survey card and were asked to rate their usability experience. The BOE collected results from both disabled and non-disabled voters.

“We are excited to see what the results from the mock election will tell us about each of the potential voting machines,” said Sally Williams, Director of the Michigan Bureau of Elections Election Liaison Division. “It’s important that we replace our aging system soon and we are fortunate to have multiple potential vendor products being tested through a very detailed process.”

The BOE is currently finalizing their evaluations. Once completed, they will prepare contract documents and complete the State purchasing process. The BOE is expected to award contracts to multiple vendors, and each county will coordinate the selection of the specific system for that county. The new systems will be rolled out gradually (county by county) in 2017 and 2018.
Voting in the United States is a “rite of passage.” It means that you have reached the age of majority and are now allowed to exercise your voice in how “for the people and by the people” is actually implemented in our democratic process of self-governance.

Since the beginning, there has been argument, debate and wars fought over whom among the population has the right to vote and take part in the ideals of self-governance. At first it was only white males - but not all white males, only white males who owned property. Eventually all white men were enfranchised to cast a ballot - but not black men and of course not women. Women, irrespective of race or ethnicity, were not allowed to vote until the suffrage movement succeeded with the passage of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920, guaranteeing women the right to vote. It wasn’t until 1870 with the enactment of the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution when black men were allowed to vote.

I really hate to even think this, but during the entire American history, people with disabilities were not even on the radar screen when it came to protecting their rights to vote. Even though we had a four term President who, from a wheelchair, defeated Hitler, the attitude was and in many cases still is;

- “They can’t vote. They don’t understand the issues.”
- “How is a blind person going to read the ballot?”
- “How is a deaf person supposed to know who to vote for if they can’t hear the candidates’ position?”
- “This person is in a wheelchair, how are they supposed to vote?”
- “People with intellectual and developmental disabilities will be persuaded by someone else on whom to vote for in the election.”

It was only after the contested 2000 Presidential election, when Congress passed the “Help America Vote Act” (HAVA), that voting accessibility for people with disabilities became a part of the national discussion. The 1990 passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act meant that every act of Congress has to pass through a filter of accessibility for all people, irrespective of their disability. This meant that HAVA had to address the accessibility of not only the voting poll locations, but voting machines and registration processes also had to assure accessibility.

Please respect the lives of so many brave individuals who protected your rights, and vote on November 8, 2016. You have the right to participate in this process.

There are at least 35 million voting-age Americans with disabilities, representing 1 out of 7 potential voters in America. According to a 2012 study by Rutgers University, people with disabilities register to vote at close to the same rate as voters without disabilities, but registered voters with disabilities vote 5.4 % less often than registered voters who do not have disabilities.

Why? People with disabilities have made slow progress toward legal equality in access to voting. Despite the protections of the law, people with disabilities still face barriers such as a lack of transportation, inaccessible voting locations, uninformed poll workers to provide reasonable accommodations and the need for a State issued photo identification or driver’s license.

Most voting reforms address physical and sensory access, not taking into account the unique access challenges faced by people with hidden disabilities. Elections are inherently local affairs, with up to 10,000 polling places, 1.4 million poll workers, and over 700,000 voting machines. A person’s voting experience varies from place to place and from election to election.

These issues will get bigger, not smaller as Americans age. Stanford Law School professor and legal historian Rabia Belt recently wrote that “people with disabilities are the ticking time bomb of the electorate.” She reports that an estimated 30-35% of all voters will need accommodations within the next 25 years. Furthermore, she argues that people with disabilities are often the first people to experience problems with voting that ultimately affect everyone’s ability to vote. So these are everyone’s issues.

MPAS is funded, in part, through the Protection and

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Advocacy for Voter Access (PAVA) program to “ensure the full participation in the electoral process for individuals with disabilities, including registering to vote, casting a vote, and accessing polling places.” MPAS uses PAVA funds to:

• Provide education, training, and assistance to people with disabilities to promote participation in the electoral process.
• Train and educate election officials, poll workers, and election volunteers on rights and best practices to support people with disabilities in voting.
• Help state and other governmental entities improve physical accessibility of polling places.

• Disseminate information on accessible voting equipment and systems.

In this issue of the Exchange, we have tried to provide you with information that will help you make the best use possible of the laws protecting the right to vote. Despite the challenges, there is no better place to start in addressing the social barriers to freedom, prosperity, and inclusion that people with disabilities face than at the ballot box. It is the fundamental rite of democratic citizenship, the ultimate expression of dignity, and the building block of change. Now that’s exciting!

(MPAS is a non-partisan organization. We do not endorse nor express an opinion on any candidate, political party or political position.)
Crain’s Detroit Business Honors MPAS Board Member

Kate Pew Wolters, Immediate Past President and current member of the Michigan Protection & Advocacy Service, Inc. Board of Directors, was recently named in Crain’s Detroit Business as one of the 100 most influential women in the state of Michigan. Since 1997, Crain’s has been honoring women in the metro Detroit area. This was the first year the publication extended their recognition statewide. The outstanding women who receive this acknowledgment are leaders in business, academia, nonprofits and public policy. Kate has a bachelor’s degree in sociology from Aquinas College and a master’s degree in social work from Michigan State University. She is a dedicated disability advocate and has been actively involved in her local community for many years. Congratulations to Kate on this worthy recognition!

Kate Pew Wolters

We Want to Hear Your Story

Has your medication been switched by your insurance company or pharmacy? Tell RWC Advocacy your story!

In many cases, patients who have a medication that works for them are surprised to find that the medication has suddenly been switched by their insurance company or pharmacy. This is often done without consent from the patient or the physician who prescribed the medication. Insurance companies looking for ways to reduce costs may decide not to pay for certain medications. Sometimes they make these changes to their formularies mid-year, leaving patients with little recourse. This is called non-medical switching and can be a problem for people with chronic conditions who have found a medication that works for them. We would like to know more about how often this occurs in Michigan, and how it affects people’s lives.

Please share your story by taking a few minutes to complete the RWC Advocacy survey [http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/nonmedicalswitching](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/nonmedicalswitching). Your response by August 12 is appreciated!

Thank you for your participation.
Memorable Voting Experience

In the fall of 1966, when I stepped into the local voting booth, I experienced both an intense sense of joy and of loss due to experiencing life-changing events at the deep personal level in the summer of 1965. I spent my summers in college working in settlement houses in Washington, D.C., and in Chicago and in the summer of 1965, I was invited to work on the side for an organization –Southern Christian Leadership Conference - as they were organizing in Chicago for support for the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Hence, I became a civil rights worker of the 60s on the streets of Chicago which meant that I was shot at, rocks thrown at my head, hit with lead pipes, and had folks with purple-faced hate/rage a foot away from my face. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 became law and we came back for an encore with the Chicago Open Housing Movement of 1966 which later led to the Civil Rights Act of 1968.

So as I voted that gray November day, so too was an elderly black woman that I met in Chicago and with whom I had broken bread. I was filled with a sense of joy that I had a very small part in her being able to vote in her lifetime. I know that she voted with tears in her eyes -tears for being able to vote for the first time and tears for her husband who was killed in the south for trying to vote. Thus, one sense of loss I felt, as I voted, was for all of those who had died seeking the right to vote for themselves and others. We must never forget their sacrifice! I also had a sense of loss of innocence, for at the age of 20, I made the decision that there were things for which I was willing to die for and that has “made all the difference” in my life journey. I have never stopped being a civil rights worker.

By Richard Osburn (Vice-Chair, PAIMI Council)

Answers to Your Questions About Voting

CAN I REGISTER TO VOTE?
You can register to vote if you are:
• a US citizen, and
• at least 18 years old by Election Day, and
• a resident of Michigan and the city or township where applying

WHERE CAN I REGISTER TO VOTE?
You can register to vote by mail, at your local clerk’s office, at a Secretary of State office, or online at www.mi.gov/vote.
• You can also register at places like:
  • Department of Health and Human Services
  • Michigan Rehabilitation Services
  • Community Mental Health
  • Bureau of Services for Blind Persons
  • Voter registration drives
First time voters who registered by mail are required to vote in person on election day. An exception is allowed for people 60 and older and individuals with disabilities.

DO I HAVE TO SHOW ID TO REGISTER TO VOTE?
No, you do not need a photo ID to register. However, by law: every Michigan voter must present photo ID at the polls, or sign an affidavit stating that he or she does not have photo ID.

WHEN SHOULD I REGISTER TO VOTE?
You can register to vote any time. However, you must be registered to vote at least 30 days before the next election.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I AM REGISTERED TO VOTE?
First-time voters should receive a voter registration card in the mail. This is proof that you are registered to vote. If one is not mailed to you, contact your local clerk’s office or check your registration at the Michigan Secretary of State website at www.mi.gov/vote.

If you are not a first-time voter and want to know if or where you are currently registered, call your local clerk or check online at www.mi.gov/vote.

WHERE DO I VOTE?
Your voter registration card will tell you the precinct number and address of your polling location. If you don’t know where to vote, you can:
• call your local clerk, or
• United Way’s 2-1-1 hotline, or
• Michigan Protection & Advocacy Service Inc. at 800.288.5923, or
• visit www.mi.gov/vote

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WHAT IF I DON’T HAVE A PHOTO ID?
You can still vote, even if you don’t bring a photo ID with you on election day. You will be asked to sign an affidavit which confirms your identity. Once you sign this form you can cast a regular ballot.

CAN I TAKE SOMEONE TO HELP ME VOTE?
Yes. If you want someone to help you vote, you may ask someone of your choosing. However, they cannot be your employer, your union representative, or a candidate. Poll workers can also help you vote, as long as there are two people representing at least two political parties.

WHAT IS A PROVISIONAL BALLOT?
A provisional ballot allows you to cast a ballot, even if you are denied a regular ballot because:
• Your name does not appear on the voter rolls
• You are at the wrong polling location

Counting of the provisional ballots begins the day after the election. If election officials can verify that you are registered to vote in the appropriate jurisdiction, your provisional ballot will count. A poll worker can tell you how to find out if your ballot was counted.

WHAT IF MY POLLING PLACE IS NOT ACCESSIBLE?
The clerk must resolve the accessibility problem and ensure that you can cast an independent private ballot. You can also call MPAS for help on election day.

On Election Day (7 am-8 pm), call:
Michigan Protection & Advocacy Service Inc.: 800.288.5923
Election Protection Coalition: 866.OUR.VOTE (866.687.8683)
United Way 2-1-1 hotline

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR AN ABSENTEE BALLOT?
You must answer at least one of the following questions with a yes to be eligible to cast an absentee vote.
• Are you 60 years or older?
• Are you unable to vote without assistance?
• Do you expect to be out of town on election day?
• Are you in jail awaiting arraignment or trial?
• Are you unable to visit the polls due to religious reasons?
• Do you plan to work as an election inspector in a precinct other than your own?

HOW DO I ASK FOR AN ABSENTEE BALLOT?
You may request an absentee ballot from your local clerk in writing. The request must be signed and include one of the reasons listed above. Applications are also available to request an absentee ballot. You can get an application by contacting your local clerk or at www.michigan/sos. Your clerk must receive the request or application by 2 pm the Saturday before the election.

I RECEIVED AN ABSENTEE BALLOT, BUT I WANT TO VOTE IN PERSON, CAN I?
Yes. When you go to vote at the polls, bring your absentee ballot with you. If you don’t bring the ballot to the polls, you will be asked to sign an affidavit stating that you did not vote by mail.

CAN I VOTE IF AWAITING A TRIAL?
Yes. You are eligible to obtain an absentee ballot if you are awaiting arraignment or trial.

I SERVED TIME IN JAIL, CAN I VOTE?
Yes, unless you are currently serving time in jail or prison for a conviction.

WHAT IF I NEED AN ACCOMMODATION?
If you need an accommodation at the polls, such as an interpreter or a ballot in Braille, you must call your local clerk at least two weeks in advance. The clerk must provide a reasonable accommodation.

WHAT IF I CAN’T FIND A RIDE TO THE POLLS?
There are many organizations that provide rides to the polls. Call your Center for Independent Living, United Way’s 2-1-1 hotline, local churches, or family and friends for assistance.

I LIVE IN A STATE FACILITY, AND NO ONE WILL TAKE ME TO THE POLLS.
No one can take away your right to vote. Plan ahead and make sure you will be able to find a ride to the polls. If staff, family or friends are unable to take you, make sure you apply for an absentee ballot before the deadline.
MICHIGAN VOTER INFORMATION CENTER

Visit Michigan.gov/vote to:

• View your sample ballot
• Find out if you are registered to vote
• Find your voting location
• Track your absentee ballot

IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER

State Primary Election Day: August 2, 2016
State General Election Day: November 8, 2016

The last day to register for the November general election is


STAY INFORMED!

Project Vote Smart
Nonpartisan resource where you can look up any candidate running for office and read their stance on issues important to you. http://votesmart.org

Respectability Report
Nonpartisan political commentary on 2016 elections with a focus on disability issues. http://therespectabilityreport.org
Michigan Protection & Advocacy Service, Inc.
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FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL 800.288.5923 OR 517.487.1755