

For Immediate Release – May 1, 2020
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Blind Voters and Michigan Secretary of State Reach Interim Settlement to Provide Accessible Absentee Ballots for Tuesday’s Elections

The Parties will Continue to Pursue a Permanent Solution for all Future Elections

(Southfield, Michigan) – The parties to a lawsuit alleging that the Michigan Bureau of Elections has failed to provide accessible absentee ballots for the blind announced a temporary solution ahead of Tuesday’s local elections. In accordance with the terms of the agreement, the Bureau of Elections will extend blind voters the option of receiving a Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting (UOCAVA) ballot, which are typically reserved for overseas voters and members of the military. The Bureau of Elections has agreed to ensure that these ballots can be completed by blind individuals independently by using electronic screen reader software. Forms for requesting accessible electronic ballots will be available on the Bureau’s website. All requests for accessible UOCAVA ballots must be submitted by Tuesday May 5, 2020 at 4 pm, along with a declaration that the individual requesting the ballot is blind or otherwise disabled, leaving them unable to complete a traditional paper absentee ballot. Disabled voters may then return the ballots to their local clerk by, among other methods, requesting that they be picked up by their local clerk’s office. The deadline to request such a pickup is 4pm on Election Day. Ballots sent by mail must be postmarked on Election Day or before.

“We are thrilled that the Bureau of Elections was willing to work with us to come up with a solution for Tuesday’s elections in such a short period of time,” said Michael Powell, President of the National Federation of the Blind of Michigan. “The State’s efforts to ensure everyone, including people with disabilities, have an opportunity to cast a ballot gives hope to the blind community.”

The solution for May 5th does not end the lawsuit. The Plaintiffs will continue to pursue a permanent solution to the lack of an accessible absentee ballot for the August and November 2020 elections, as well as for all future elections.

“Actions speak louder than words, and while the State’s lack of progress on voting accessibly has been and continues to be a major concern, Secretary of State Benson has proven herself today to be a progressive Secretary of State and open to expanding access to disabled voters, and for that we thank her,” said Attorney Jason Turkish, who represented plaintiffs Michael Powell and Fred Wurtzel in the lawsuit. “Her decisive action to guarantee blind voters have access to the polls in the midst of a pandemic should serve as a model for the rest of the country as we navigate these uncertain times.”

“The blind continue to face barriers to full-participation in the democratic process,” said Attorney Eve Hill, counsel for Plaintiff The National Federation of the Blind of Michigan. “Secretary Benson has taken the time to hear my clients’ concerns and worked to ensure the Bureau of Elections could provide an interim solution for the May 5th elections. We look forward to a permanent and sustainable solution for all future elections.”

Information related to requesting an accessible absentee ballot can be found on the Bureau of Election’s website. <https://www.michigan.gov/elections/> Eligible voters may also contact their city or township clerk to obtain additional information regarding requesting an accessible absentee ballot.