



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Lawsuit Brings Equity to Blind Voters Registering to Vote

Settlement Is Most Comprehensive Ever to Make Voter Registration and Election Information Accessible to Millions of Blind Voters

New York (February 25, 2019): Blind voters in New York will now have access to websites operated by the State Board of Elections (BOE) and the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). In a settlement just reached by blind voters, advocates, and the two state agencies, the BOE and the DMV have agreed to ensure fully accessible voter registration by the end of 2019. The agreement resolves a [lawsuit brought in 2016](#) by the [National Federation of the Blind](#) (NFB), the Center for the Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY), and two individual blind plaintiffs, Eva Eason and Meghan Parker. The plaintiffs were represented by the American Civil Liberties Union Disability Rights Program, Brown Goldstein & Levy, LLP, and Disability Rights Advocates.

Plaintiffs in this lawsuit had tried repeatedly to register to vote online—a process that should be both easier and more confidential than a trip to the DMV. However, both websites presented barriers to those who use screen-reader software—a common type of assistive technology that allows blind users to hear text and navigate websites. Other portions of the DMV and BOE websites were also inaccessible—including important information on polling places, election information, and voting results.

Eva Eason, plaintiff, said, “I am thrilled that we have settled the suit and increased understanding of the importance of accessible web formats. It is my fundamental right to access and navigate websites as freely as my sighted counterparts. No voter should be overlooked by the state. Every vote must count. This is long overdue.”

Under the agreement, the BOE and the DMV will make their websites accessible to screen-access software within two years. They will also work with an accessibility consultant and put in place practices and procedures to ensure that the websites stay accessible in the long term. A federal court publicly approved the settlement last week.

“Voting is one of the most precious rights that we have as citizens, and while it culminates in the casting of a ballot in an election, it involves much more,” said Mark Riccobono, President of the National Federation of the Blind. “We commend the New York State Board of Elections and Department of Motor Vehicles for recognizing that the privacy and independence of blind voters are no less important than those of other voters, and we look forward to working with these

agencies to make voter registration and access to critical information fully accessible to blind New Yorkers. We further hope that other state election officials will take note of this historic and comprehensive agreement as they work to ensure the rights of their blind voters.”

Susan M. Dooha, executive director of the CIDNY, said, “For people who are blind, an inaccessible website is voter suppression. We are proud to have brought about an agreement with the NYS BOE and DMV...This shows that the state can eliminate barriers that prevent the enfranchisement of people with disabilities.”

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About the National Federation of the Blind

The National Federation of the Blind (NFB), headquartered in Baltimore, is the oldest and largest nationwide organization of blind Americans. Founded in 1940, the NFB consists of affiliates, chapters, and divisions in the fifty states, Washington DC, and Puerto Rico. The NFB defends the rights of blind people of all ages and provides information and support to families with blind children, older Americans who are losing vision, and more. We believe in the hopes and dreams of blind people and work together to transform them into reality. Learn more about our many programs and initiatives at nfb.org.

About Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY (CIDNY)

The Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY’s goal is to ensure full integration, independence, and equal opportunity for all people with disabilities by removing barriers to the social, economic, cultural, and civic life of the community. Learn more about our work at cidny.org.

About Disability Rights Advocates (DRA)

With offices in New York and California, Disability Rights Advocates (DRA) is one of the leading non-profit disability rights legal centers in the nation. DRA’s mission is to advance equal rights and opportunities for people with all types of disabilities nationwide. As a part of that mission, DRA has entered in settlements that both ensure greater voting rights for people with disabilities, working to remedy inaccessible polling sites in New York City and non-functioning ballot marking devices in Alameda County, as well as greater internet access for the blind, pressuring corporations to create and maintain websites that are accessible to blind users.

About the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

For nearly 100 years, the ACLU has worked in courts, legislatures, and communities to protect the constitutional rights of all people. With a nationwide network of offices and millions of members and supporters, we take up the toughest civil liberties fights. Beyond one person, party, or side—we the people dare to create a more perfect union. We work to ensure people with disabilities are part of that perfect union, and advocate for full access to education, homes, health care, jobs, and the ballot. Learn more at aclu.org.

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