



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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## **New Hampshire Voters with Disabilities Demand Access to State's Inaccessible Absentee Voting Process**

*Lawsuit Filed in Federal Court*

**July 8, 2020** –Concord, NH

A coalition of disability organizations has filed a lawsuit against Secretary of State William Gardner and the New Hampshire Department of State asserting discrimination against voters with disabilities who are unable to independently and privately mark an absentee paper ballot due to blindness, low vision, or physical disability.

The lawsuit and request for preliminary injunction were filed by [Disability Rights Center-New Hampshire](#) (DRC-NH) and [Brown, Goldstein & Levy, LLP](#) on behalf of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), the National Federation of the Blind of New Hampshire (NFBNH), Granite State Independent Living (GSIL), and several New Hampshire voters with disabilities, including Daniel Frye, Jean Shiner, and Jeffrey Dickinson. The lawsuit alleges that the process for requesting an absentee ballot is inaccessible and that the requirement that absentee voters fill out and mail in a printed paper ballot discriminates against blind and physically disabled voters, who – unlike their nondisabled fellow voters – must choose between having someone else fill out their ballot, forfeiting their right to vote privately and independently, or subjecting themselves and their loved ones to a life-threatening pandemic by visiting a polling place in person.

The plaintiffs seek the implementation of an accessible system for electronic delivery and marking of absentee ballots by voters who are blind or who have other physical disabilities and an accessible process for voters to register to vote and request an absentee ballot.

“The National Federation of the Blind has made New Hampshire’s election officials aware of their obligations to blind voters and offered our expertise and assistance, but so far to no avail,” said Mark Riccobono, President of the National Federation of the

Blind. “We therefore bring this litigation to prevent the continued treatment of New Hampshire’s blind voters as second-class citizens.”

“People with disabilities have the right to vote privately and independently, even during a pandemic. Secretary Gardner must take action now, in advance of the September 8 primary, to make sure that all voters can register to vote, request an absentee ballot and vote safely at home,” said Stephanie Patrick, Executive Director of DRC-NH. “Absentee voting must be accessible to everyone.”

“GSIL believes voting is a protected right afforded all Granite Staters and that the state must meet the minimum needs of voters with disabilities to avoid disenfranchising this voting block,” said Deborah Ritcey, CEO of GSIL. “The need for fully accessible absentee ballots has never been more important than during the current COVID19 pandemic.”

This lawsuit was filed in the federal court for the District of New Hampshire under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Rather than monetary damages, plaintiffs seek reform to the systems and practices that discriminate against voters with disabilities in time for the September 8, 2020 primary election and the November 3, 2020 general election.

[Read the Full Complaint Here](#)

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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 [www.nfb.org](http://www.nfb.org).

### **About Disability Rights Center-NH**

Disability Rights Center-NH is New Hampshire’s designated Protection and Advocacy system and is dedicated to eliminating barriers existing in New Hampshire to the full and equal enjoyment of civil and other legal rights by people with disabilities. More information about DRC-NH can be found at [www.drcnh.org](http://www.drcnh.org).

### **About Granite State Independent Living**

Granite State Independent Living is New Hampshire’s a statewide nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote quality of life with independence for people with disabilities and seniors through advocacy, information, education, support and transition services.

GSIL serves as the designated statewide independent living organization. More information about GSIL can be found at [www.gsil.org](http://www.gsil.org).