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New Hampshire Voters with Disabilities Reach Agreement with State Election officials

October 13, 2021–Concord, NH—A coalition of disability organizations and individuals has reached an agreement with Secretary of State William Gardner and the New Hampshire Department of State resolving the remaining issues in a [lawsuit](#) filed on behalf of the coalition last year. The suit alleged 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 agreement requires the state to make its voter registration and information websites accessible to blind people and people with low vision who use text-to-speech screen readers and/or Braille devices to access the internet. The state will also continue to use a [remote accessible vote-by-mail system](#) that it adopted as a result of the lawsuit and implemented in time for the September 2020 Primary and the November 2020 Presidential elections.

Election officials will continue to investigate whether a system that also allows the electronic return of marked absentee ballots by voters with disabilities can be implemented in time for the next general election in 2024. The current system allows ballots to be marked using a computer, but the ballot must then be printed and mailed by the voter or someone assisting them, compromising ballot secrecy. In the meantime, reasonable accommodations will be made available to disabled voters who request assistance with returning their ballots.

The coalition was comprised of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), the National Federation of the Blind of New Hampshire (NFBNH), Granite State Independent Living (GSIL), and four New Hampshire voters with disabilities – Daniel Frye, Jean Shiner, Daniel Hebert, and Jeffrey Dickinson. These parties were represented by [Disability Rights Center-New Hampshire](#) (DRC-NH) and [Brown, Goldstein & Levy, LLP](#).

“We are pleased that a remote accessible ballot delivery and marking tool is currently in place and recognize that the state of New Hampshire is taking important steps through this agreement to better serve voters with disabilities,” said Mark Riccobono, President of the National Federation of the Blind. “At the same time, we believe that blind voters are best served by the ability to return our ballots electronically as well. We urge New Hampshire and all other jurisdictions to implement this component so that the entire vote-by-mail process can be accomplished with complete privacy and independence and without fear.”

"We are pleased that, as a result of this lawsuit, people with disabilities were able to vote more privately and independently by absentee ballot in the September 2020 Primary and the November 2020 Presidential election. We hope that the state will continue to improve the voting experiences for people with disabilities in the future, as outlined in the settlement agreement and more broadly," said Stephanie Patrick, Executive Director of DRC-NH.

“COVID-19 has brought into sharp relief ongoing inequities endured by people with disabilities, including but not limited to at the ballot box. Voting is a fundamental right which should be accessible to all who wish to participate in democracy. Thank you to DRC-NH, the other plaintiffs and the Secretary of State’s Office for their hard work in reaching this agreement,” said Deborah Ritcey, CEO of GSIL.

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About the National Federation of the Blind

The National Federation of the Blind (NFB), headquartered in Baltimore, 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. Founded in 1940, the NFB is the transformative membership and advocacy organization of blind Americans with affiliates, chapters, and divisions in the fifty states, Washington DC, and Puerto Rico. 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 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.

About Granite State Independent Living

Granite State Independent Living is New Hampshire’s 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.