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New Law Enables Blind Voters
to Independently and Privately Mark
Printed Mail Ballots

Denver (May. 28, 2019): Blind voters in Colorado will celebrate tomorrow as Governor Jared Polis signs Senate Bill 19-202, Voting Rights for Voters with Disabilities into law at 11 a.m. This historic legislation enables blind voters and voters with other disabilities to receive and mark an electronically delivered ballot using nonvisual access, low vision, or other assistive technology on a home computer or mobile device.

Voters with disabilities will be able to request that their ballot be delivered to them electronically. The ballot is marked using nonvisual access, low vision, or other assistive technology, printed, and mailed in or deposited in the appropriate drop box.

And Colorado voters with disabilities will have the confidence of casting their votes using the same assistive technology they use every day to read e-mail, do their personal online banking or post on social media. So, if they are too busy to get to the polling center, or simply would prefer to have the privacy and time to vote from home or elsewhere, they will now be able to do so without having to tell someone their votes and to trust they will be recorded accurately.

Senators Jessie Danielson (D-Wheat Ridge) and Rachel Zenzinger (D-Arvada) championed the bill in the Senate, and in the House, Representative Meg Froelich (D-Greenwood Village) sponsored the legislation. Senate Bill 19-202 received bipartisan support and passed both houses of the General Assembly without opposition.

“We Salute Governor Polis, Senators Danielson and Rachel Zenzinger, Representative Froelich, and the members of the General Assembly for passing this law and helping us secure our rightful place in our democracy,” said Scott LaBarre, President of the National Federation of the Blind of Colorado.

“When Colorado went to a mail ballot in 2013, the technology to make it accessible to people with disabilities simply didn't exist," said Curtis Chong, a retired blind Assistive Technology manager who helped pass a similar law in New Mexico last year before moving to Aurora. "Now that this bill is law, people with disabilities in Colorado will have the same access to the mail ballot as everybody else. They can now mark the ballot on their own without needing to obtain help from anyone."

Since 2013, the only way for blind voters in Colorado to cast a ballot privately and independently was to go to a polling and voting center. There, they could use electronic voting machines that read the ballot choices while they listened with headphones. When finished, the ballot was printed for tabulation.

Such voting systems came into use across the United States in 2006, when the Help America Vote Act went into effect. Every polling place was required to have an electronic voting machine, and that machine was required to be accessible to all voters with disabilities, including the blind. Those systems will continue to be available.

If a voter with a disability couldn’t bake it to the polling center however, they would have to revert to having someone else read and mark their ballot for them, the situation that prevailed prior to 2006. Divulging every voting choice to someone else is unthinkable to all other American voters, let alone trusting someone else to accurately mark your ballot.

Signing will be at 11 a.m. at the Capitol, Room 123. SB19-202 will be signed into law along with a number of other voting bills passed in the 2019 session.

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About the National Federation of the Blind of Colorado

The National Federation of the Blind of Colorado (NFBCO) is the state’s affiliate of the oldest, largest, and most influential nationwide membership organization of blind people. Founded in 1955, the NFBCO advocates for the civil rights and equality of blind Coloradans, and develops innovative education, technology, and training programs to provide the blind and those who are losing vision with the tools they need to become independent and successful. Members of the public and press are warmly invited to visit our Colorado Center for the Blind to learn more about our innovative programs, 2233 W. Shepperd Ave., Littleton, Colorado. Learn more about the NFB of Colorado at nfbco.org or at theblindcoloradoan.blogspot.com