

ABSENTEE BALLOTS NOW ACCESSIBLE TO ALL: TENNESSEE LAUNCHES NEW ACCESSIBLE ABSENTEE VOTING PROCESS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NASHVILLE, TN -- The State of Tennessee has begun offering accessible absentee ballots for people with print disabilities in response to a demand by Disability Rights Tennessee (DRT) in collaboration with the Civil Rights Education and Enforcement Center and National Federation of the Blind of Tennessee.

The recent expansion of absentee voting during the COVID-19 pandemic is offering many a pathway to exercise their right to vote without risking exposure to the virus. However, until now absentee voting in Tennessee has not been accessible to voters with print disabilities due to the use of paper ballots. A print disability interferes with the ability to effectively read, write, or use print materials and includes blindness, low vision, and some physical disabilities such as paralysis. The new accessible absentee ballot process allows voters with print disabilities to use supporting technology like screen readers and others to complete absentee voting forms.

“This month we celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The State’s decision is a timely reminder that it is possible to ensure that public services are available for all,” says Brian Keller, DRT Public Policy and Voting Attorney.

This new offering by Tennessee ensures that people with print disabilities will be able to exercise their right to vote independently and privately while voting absentee, not only during the current crisis, but in future elections as well.

“We are pleased that the state moved swiftly to secure the rights of blind voters without the need for litigation,” said Terry Smith, President of the National Federation of the Blind of Tennessee. “Equal access to voting means access to all of the same options that other voters have, for which the National Federation of the Blind is fighting across the nation. We are pleased that it will finally be achieved in our state.”

More information about Tennessee’s accessible absentee ballots:

- How to request an accessible absentee ballot:
 - Visit the [Tennessee Secretary of State’s website](#) and click the link titled “Download Print Disability Absentee Ballot Request Form.”
 - Complete the form, which is compatible with screen readers and electronically fillable.
 - Print and sign anywhere on the form.

- Once your request is approved, your county election office will send you an electronic ballot that is compatible with screen readers and electronically fillable.
- Once you complete your ballot, you will be able to print it out, and send it back to your county election office. Be sure to follow instructions about sending it back and be sure to sign the envelope as instructed.
- Contact DRT at 1 (800) 342-1660 or GetHelp@disabilityrightstn.org if:
 - You have questions or issues about requesting a print disability absentee ballot.
 - You need an accessible absentee ballot but have already requested a standard absentee ballot.

Many partners helped advocate for accessible absentee ballots, especially National Federation of the Blind Tennessee, Mid Tennessee Council of the Blind, Tennessee Disability Coalition, The Arc of Tennessee, and Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. It is imperative that all eligible voters be able to cast a ballot privately and independently. Now that is a reality.

To schedule an interview:

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Disability Rights Tennessee (DRT), formerly Disability Law & Advocacy Center of Tennessee, is the designated protection & advocacy agency for Tennessee. DRT provides free legal advocacy services to protect the rights of Tennesseans with disabilities. For 40 years, DRT has served over 50,000 people through direct services, education, and systemic advocacy.

<https://www.disabilityrightstn.org/>

Civil Rights Education and Enforcement Center (CREEC) is a nonprofit membership organization whose goal is to ensure that everyone can fully and independently participate in our nation's civic life without discrimination based on race, gender, disability, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation, or gender identity. <https://creeclaw.org/>