



Advocacy Center for Persons with Disabilities, Inc. **PRESS RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE — October 26, 2004

Contact: Barry M. Shalinsky
Phone Number: 813-233-2920 x203
Email Address: barrys@advocacycenter.org

Historic Turnout of Voters with Disabilities Expected

Advocacy Center Leading Get-Out-the-Vote Effort to Ensure Voters with Disabilities and Their Families Can Get to the Polls on Election Day

(Tampa, Florida) – Despite ongoing problems with inaccessible polling places, inaccessible ballots and inadequate poll worker training in some places, Florida voters with disabilities are voting in historic numbers this election.

It is clear that the outcome of the 2004 Presidential election will have a major impact on the rights and services for millions of Americans with disabilities and their families. Florida's statewide Protection and Advocacy system for persons with disabilities, The Advocacy Center is leading an unprecedented Get-Out-The-Vote effort to ensure that voters with disabilities can overcome the many persistent barriers to the ballot.

“Citizens of Florida with disabilities have the same voting rights as other Floridians. No eligible voter should be turned away from the polls this election,” said Hubert Grissom, the Advocacy Center's Interim Executive Director. “So it is urgent that voters with disabilities know who to call for help.”

The Advocacy Center is urging voters with disabilities to vote early if possible. By voting early, voters may choose the time and early voting location which is most convenient and avoid longer lines on Election Day. And all early voting sites should be accessible, unlike about half of Florida's precinct polling places which have been granted accessibility waivers for this election. Voters with disabilities may also vote by absentee ballot, if necessary or in-person on Election Day. Voters who plan to vote on Election Day, November 2, should call their county Supervisor of Elections to find out if their polling place is accessible.

The Presidential candidates have offered clear choices on a range of issues affecting persons with disabilities, and all Americans. These issues, along with the closeness of the election, are expected to drive an exceptional turn-out of voters with disabilities and their families. People with disabilities represent as much as 20% of the entire voting-age population.

A recent nationwide poll conducted by the National Organization on Disability and Harris Interactive found that 21% of voters with disabilities were unable to vote in past presidential or congressional elections because of barriers faced either at, or in getting to, the polls. Additionally, 22% of survey respondents stated that poll workers challenged their eligibility to vote. (Visit the National Organization on Disability Web site at www.nod.org for complete poll results).

Implementation of the federal Help America Vote Act is leading to significant improvements in accessibility in many states, including Florida. Though more progress is needed, voters with disabilities should not be discouraged from voting because of past difficulties.

Anyone who has a voting related question or problem should call the Advocacy Center's Protection and Advocacy for Voter Access line at 866-875-1794. TDD 866-875-1837. Or you may call the Election Protection hotline at (866) OUR-VOTE, (866-687-8683), a national hotline staffed with attorneys and voting rights advocates. The Secretary of State also has a voter information hotline at 866-308-6739. Hearing impaired callers may need to use relay systems. The Florida Relay Service number is 800-955-8771.

Tips for Voters with Disabilities

Find out where your voting place is and if it is accessible. If you cannot get into your voting place, you will need to make plans to vote early or by absentee ballot. Don't delay. Make the necessary arrangements NOW! Provisional ballots cast at the wrong precinct on Election Day will not be counted.

Vote EARLY if you need to or would like to. Early voting is convenient, and if there are problems with your registration, it allows more time to sort them out. Florida also allows absentee voting by anyone who requests an absentee ballot (you don't have to be away or unable to go to the polls). Decide what will make it easiest for you to cast your vote, and do it!!

Go to the polls early on Election Day ... and Remember Your ID. If you cannot get into your voting place, say that you want a ballot brought to you. Be prepared, and be first in line when the polls open!!

If you have any problems at the polling place, call the Advocacy Center at 866-875-1794, or the Election Protection hotline at (866) OUR-VOTE, (866-687-8683). Election Protection is a nationwide program run by civil rights and voting rights groups to safeguard your right to cast a ballot on Election Day. There are experts and attorneys standing by nationwide, from now until after the Election, to assist you.