



**National Disability Rights Network
Statement on Balancing Security and Accessibility in Voting**

Following a contentious presidential election and investigation into foreign interference with the electoral process, the national public discourse on American democracy has understandably turned to voting cybersecurity. The National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) believes that action to protect the security of our votes is necessary to ensure the health of our electoral system. However, the need to create accurate and secure elections must be balanced with protecting access to the vote for all eligible Americans.

Voting systems that rely on an electorate capable of independently marking and verifying a paper ballot have become a preferred solution to protecting vote security. Understandably, if all voters are able to mark their ballots privately and independently and visually verify that the completed paper ballot is correct, elections officials could routinely audit election results that are verified to have captured voter intent. Yet, the ability to privately and independently mark, and visually verify, a paper ballot is simply not an option for all voters. A return to hand-marked paper ballots will inevitably, inexcusably disenfranchise voters - even as access to the vote for people with disabilities has improved under the Help America Vote Act (HAVA).

Direct-recording electronic (DRE) voting systems have provided the best option for voting privately and independently, as guaranteed to all voters by HAVA. The lack of a paper audit trail, particularly that can be verified directly by the voter, have made DRE systems particularly controversial. Given its potential for providing access to the vote for people with disabilities, refining the verification and security capability of these systems going forward should not be ruled out.

As paper ballots rise in popularity, systems that allow eligible voters to use a ballot marking device to complete a paper (typically optical scan) ballot using a touch screen to mark selections directly onto paper are increasingly popular. Optical scan systems available on the market today make this process significantly more private and independent than traditional punch card and paper ballot systems. However, complete independence has yet to be fully achieved by any system that relies on paper ballots. Further, the ability to verify ballot selections on a marked paper ballot requires the ability for voting technology to read a printed sheet of paper back to the voter – technology that is costly, has not been subject to rigorous testing, and results in significantly more complicated voting systems (ie, decreased reliability and shorter life span of the voting system). Simply put, even preferred optical scan systems are not equipped for all voters to independently mark and verify their ballots without disenfranchising voters with disabilities.

Security of our elections is an issue that is crucial to the health of our democracy and must not be taken lightly. Likewise, a private and independent vote is the law of the land, and an electoral system that knowingly denies the vote to any of its eligible citizens to appease others is simply not a democracy. NDRN firmly believes that all Americans, including people with disabilities, want secure, accurate, and fair elections, but not at the expense of the right to vote for people with disabilities.