

# The Most Severely Disenfranchised Voters – Persons with Disabilities and Overseas Voters – Can Be Provided Secure, Reliable and Independent Access to Their Ballots, in a Cost-Effective Manner

## ELECTRONIC BALLOT DELIVERY AND REMOTE ELECTRONIC VOTING

Electronic ballot delivery enfranchises an increasing number of remote voters while creating administrative efficiencies and cost savings for election officials. It has proven to be successful, secure and reliable. Due to its many benefits, electronic ballot delivery and voting are being used more often by overseas voters (military and civilians) and persons with disabilities.

Too many voters with disabilities are unable to vote privately, or at all. It is estimated that more than 51 million Americans live with a disability, with over 32 million having a severe disability. With the addition of a remote electronic voting solution these citizens, most of whom are eligible voters, could now be able to exercise their full voting rights – even if unable to reach a polling station or mark a paper ballot.

Issues of access are equally problematic for overseas voters. Service members face limitations in their ability to vote due to the remoteness of their location or inability to receive mail in a timely manner. Citizens living outside the U.S. may reside many miles away from their nearest polling station. Severe time constraints may also exist between the time a ballot is finalized and the timeframe a voter must cast a ballot. The types of limitations and obstacles which may affect overseas voters are endless. Increasingly, however, election officials are turning to electronic voting in an effort to solve these logistical problems, and just as important, address concerns for equality of voting rights.

### 2008 Election Statistics

- 17% of military requesting absentee ballots never receive their ballot
- Absentee ballot return by the general population is 91%, compared to 67% of overseas and military (UOCAVA) voters

## ADMINISTRATIVE EFFICIENCIES AND COST SAVINGS

A critical component of choosing an electronic ballot solution is the election experience guiding the technology development and the implementation of the voting solution. Streamlined processes and cost efficiencies result when election and security technology are coupled with election expertise.

With the right technology, an election official can provide voters universal access to elections that are transparent, provide ease of use, are scalable to their election needs, and improve ballot marking accuracy – while decreasing costs and increasing efficiencies. An experienced electronic voting solution provider will guide the process using established procedures, which will be repeated and reflect added benefits with each subsequent election – requiring less time from election officials.

Electronic voting solutions can also be deployed faster and less costly than printed ballots and can be offered in polling stations. They are also designed for use by all voters, not only those with disabilities and living abroad. These solutions are particularly cost-effective for special elections.

## PROVEN SUCCESSES WITH ELECTRONIC VOTING

Electronic voting solutions improve voting results as demonstrated by the following elections:

- In the **2007 Australian Parliamentary** election, **voting by troops serving overseas increased** to 75%, up from 23% in the prior election.
- U.S. expatriates located in 169 countries voted in the **2008 Democratic Presidential Primary** using end-to-end electronic technology. The **number of ballots cast was seven times higher** than in 2004 when the primary was conducted using traditional mail voting.
- In 2009, **Honolulu** held the **first all-digital election** in the U.S., which included private voting for the blind. This was done at one-third the cost of their previous election.

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*In the 2008 U.S. election, 44% of registered people with disabilities who did not vote cited "illness or disability" as the reason for not voting.*

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As reported in the *National Journal*, when the U.S. Democratic Party allowed expatriates to vote in the 2008 Presidential Primary from abroad, voter registration increased tenfold, with 54% choosing to vote online compared to only 3% for paper (mail and fax combined).

### Positive Reviews from Voters with Disabilities

For the 2009 U.S. primary and general elections, electronic ballot delivery was provided for 73,000 residents in Franklin County, Washington. While available to all voters, it was targeted for use by

#### VOTER COMMENTS

"It's difficult to open envelopes, draw lines and stuff envelopes due to my disability."

"I like the simplicity; it's pretty easy to understand."

"[It is] hard for me to get to & from the mail boxes."

voters with disabilities due to its compatibilities with devices widely used in the disability community. Some of the features touted in voter feedback included the ability to use the JAWS screen reader and the ability to mark the ballot with a computer instead of by hand. Most users found the screen easier to read than a traditional paper ballot. Response from the disability community was overwhelmingly positive.

*Fifty percent of Franklin County voters answered an online survey. When asked if they would use online ballot marking if offered again in future elections, 94% of respondents said "yes."*

## SECURITY OF ELECTRONIC VOTING

Election solution security must take precedence. An experienced provider of secure voting solutions will have a demonstrable understanding of software, data security and management, and elections management. Trusted electronic voting solutions are kept secure using proven security protocols, proactive measures and digital encryption.

Encryption keeps a ballot private, providing the confidence that the ballot is tamper-proof. Digital encryption is made up of extremely complicated mathematical formulas which scramble the message with long numeric passwords or keys, yielding a series of numbers that read as nonsense to anyone lacking the secret decoding passwords. It is important to use a military-grade system with an ever-changing 168-digit binary key to encrypt each completed ballot before sending it to the tabulation office. Computers pick a new secret key for each ballot thus ensuring that every ballot is individually protected. Encryption protects privacy and prevents alteration; any change to the stream of numbers – while nearly impossible – would result in gibberish when decoded.



## VOTER PRIVACY AND INCREASED ACCESS

In addition to the privacy afforded through the use of secure ballot marking, voters using electronic election options have greater independence in marking and casting their ballot. Many voters with

visual impairments have never voted without assistance and as reflected in the statistic to the right, voters have cited their disability as their reason for not being able to vote. Audio voting from a phone ensures that the visually impaired can vote independently and privately. Online voting allows for the physically challenged to avoid accessibility pitfalls at their local polling place.

These electronic voting solutions use communications tools (telephones and computers) which already exist in or near the voter's home and work with common assistive technology and devices: such as joysticks or sip-and-puff; screen readers; Braille displays; or other assistive devices. One may vote using a computer and the Internet or their telephone to mark and submit a completed ballot electronically, or they can mark and return a printed ballot. Either way, these options increase accessibility and remove the burden of travelling to a polling station.

Persons with disabilities all have one thing in common – the challenge of voting independently and privately. Increasing access to the ballot for persons with disabilities is good for democracy and has a direct impact on the ability of voters to influence their own state of life.

### **VOTERS LIVING ABROAD**

Whether serving in the military, volunteering as missionaries, studying, working or retiring abroad, it is estimated that more than six million Americans live outside of the United States. In addition to the costs and logistics involved in generating and mailing paper ballots, there can be significant delays in international (and military) mail delivery of blank ballots and return of voted ballots. This delay is compounded when people move, such as redeployed military personnel. The result: large numbers of ballots arriving too late to be legally counted. Consequently, many overseas voters have given up trying to vote on time.

It is also easy to make mistakes on mailed paper ballots, which may result in having them voided. An unrecognizable mark on a paper ballot is all it takes to have it discarded in many jurisdictions. Undervoting (skipping a line) and overvoting (marking more than the allowed number of choices) are frequent occurrences with pencil-marked forms. Additionally, procedural errors invalidate absentee ballots in large numbers. Electronic voting solutions improve ballot marking accuracy.

Electronic ballot delivery and marking solutions have made it possible for thousands of people unable to access a polling place and who have never been able to cast a ballot privately to enjoy their rightful place and purpose as citizens of their countries.

### **CONCLUSION**

Every eligible voter, regardless of disability or geographic location, deserves the opportunity to exercise his or her right to vote. Yet, millions of citizens in remote locations and those with visual, motor and cognitive impairments are unable to do so using traditional paper forms and in-person voting solutions. It does not have to be this way.

Proven electronic election solutions deliver secure ballots, improve privacy and marking accuracy, are compatible with assistive devices for persons with disabilities, and enable voting from remote locations, whether at home or in the battle field. All of this while creating administrative efficiencies and cost savings for election officials.



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