

The Rhode Island Governor's Commission on Disabilities is Removing Barriers in Voting

The Governor's Commission on Disabilities (GCD) works to ensure accessibility in the voting process. For example, we conduct monitoring of polling places to ensure that all polling places are free of barriers that would prevent someone with a disability from voting.

An individual who is blind contacted the GCD because they were unable to access the electronic signature section using a screen reader to sign their name to the Mail Ballot Application form. As a result, they had to rely on a third-party application BeMyEyes to take control of their computer to locate the signature. We verified the issue and began the process of contacting the appropriate parties to fix the issue.

The GCD held our Annual Public Forum a few days later, where the Voter brought up the same issue again and said that multiple forms for voting access had the same lack of accessibility using a screen reader in the signature section.

Assistant ADA Coordinator Crystal Martin contacted the Secretary of State's (SOS) Office with the information on the lack of accessibility in the Mail Ballot Application and requested that they be updated. The SOS acted swiftly in making the changes and reported back to the GCD. From there the SOS also contacted the Board of Elections (BOE), where actions were also taken to update the multiple forms on the BOE website to be completely accessible by screen readers.

Our organization has also been collaborating with the SOS, BOE, Disability Rights Rhode Island, the Ocean State Center for Independent Living, and the Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing on the creation of an informational video on the use of the ExpressVote. Voters will be filmed during two scheduled dates in the first half of August, with a goal to have the video officially released after a technical assistance review by the GCD by the State Primary on September 20, 2024.