



Advocates for people with intellectual disabilities and related developmental disabilities

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Testimony before The Government Administration and Elections Committee

S. B. No. 287 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING ACCESSIBLE VOTING FOR VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES OR NEEDING ASSISTANCE.

by

Leslie Simoes, Assistant Executive Director/The Arc of Connecticut

Good morning Senator Slossberg, Representative Spallone, and Members of the GAE Committee. My name is Leslie Simoes and I am the Assistant Executive Director of The Arc of Connecticut, a 58-year-old statewide advocacy organization for individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families. We have 23 local chapters that provide supports, services, and advocacy for individuals with intellectual disabilities throughout Connecticut.

I am here this morning to testify in favor of **S.B. 287 AN ACT CONCERNING ACCESSIBLE VOTING FOR VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES OR NEEDING ASSISTANCE.**

Individuals with disabilities have voices that should be heard all the time and especially at election time. The Arc strongly believes that all individuals with disabilities should be allowed access to voting systems that support the individual as they exercise their civil right to vote. Each voting system at each polling site in Connecticut should be equipped for individuals with disabilities that comply with the provisions of the Help America Vote Act.

HAVA is United States federal law which passed and was signed into law by President Bush on October 29, 2002. It was drafted at least in part in reaction to the controversy surrounding the 2000 U.S. presidential election. Almost two million ballots were disqualified in the 2000 election because they registered multiple votes or none when run through vote-counting machines.

HAVA mandates that all states and localities upgrade many aspects of their election procedures, including their voting machines, registration processes and poll worker training.

The specifics of implementation have been left up to each state, which allows for varying interpretations of the Federal law.

HAVA has provisions in it to make payments to state and local governments for making polling places, including the path of travel, entrances, exits, and voting areas of each polling facility, accessible to individuals with disabilities, including the blind and visually impaired, in a manner that provides the same opportunity for access and participation (including privacy and independence) as for other voters; and providing individuals with disabilities and others with information about the accessibility of polling places, including outreach programs to inform the individuals about the availability of accessible polling places and training election officials, poll workers, and election volunteers on how best to promote the access and participation of individuals with disabilities in elections for Federal office.

The Arc of Connecticut hopes the State of Connecticut embraces these aspects of HAVA and creates more assessable voting for individuals with disabilities or for others needing assistance.