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Braille Voting Instructions - Improving Voter Empowerment

Fairfax County, Virginia

Submitted by:

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BRILLE VOTING INSTRUCTIONS – INCREASING VOTER EMPOWERMENT

Fairfax County, Virginia, is a diverse and thriving county located in Northern Virginia. The County's population of more than 1.1 million residents exceeds that of eight states and the District of Columbia. Covering 406 square miles, nearly 700,000 registered voters cast their ballots at 241 precincts, where there are at least three elections every year; in most years there are additional special elections.

Providing equal voting access for all citizens is critical. In 2003, Fairfax County used Help America Vote Act (HAVA) funds to purchase new WINVote Direct Recording Electronic (DRE) voting machines which permitted voters to cast ballots electronically at the polls. The WINVote machines also allowed the County to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disability Act. Voters were able to cast their ballots using such assistive devices as screen enlargers, headphones, and puff devices. Over the years – and with continued, sometimes punishing, use – this equipment began to reach the end of its useful life. As the WINVote machines became progressively less reliable, the voting experiences for members of the disability community began to suffer while election officers scrambled to ensure fully operational equipment was available.

In 2014, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors authorized the purchase of new voting equipment – a 6.4 million dollar integrated voting system including 1,125 state-of-the-art voting machines. The 525 Digital Scan voting machines and 600 ExpressVote machines provide Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) access to voting while ensuring a paper ballot for all voters in case a recount is required. Voters mark a paper ballot and insert it into the DS200 Digital Scan machine. To the average voter used to optical scan equipment, the process is not very different. (The prior optical scanning machines were acquired in 2007 to ensure sufficient voting equipment when the State no longer allowed the purchase of additional DREs.) The ExpressVote machines are a very different set of technology. Fully compliant with the ADA, they feature assistive devices such as audio instructions, magnifications, and puff technology so that differently-abled voters can mark a ballot. This ballot is also then inserted into the DS200 to complete the voting process.

During the procurement process, Fairfax County solicited input from many sources to achieve the optimal voter experience. The process included extensive input from disability advocates who echoed locally what the Presidential Commission on Election Administration had said nationally – the disability community wants to be part of the voting process and wants to do so as independently as possible.

While working with vendors on procurement, great technological advances were evident to enable this segment of society to more fully participate in the electoral process. There was still

one impediment for the visually impaired voter to fully independent participation. An election officer needed to explain the machine's operations prior to starting, as the voter needed to know how to insert the ballot into the machine (using the right corner cut to align the ballot).

Fairfax County found a simple, inexpensive method to bridge this gap and to further the independence of the visually impaired voter. Upon checking in and requesting to use ADA compliant voting equipment, voters are offered a Braille user guide. The Braille card reads:

Put the headphones over your ears to receive instructions. To begin voting, insert your card with the corner cut to the front and right as you insert. The card slot is identified with Braille reading, "Card Slot". The audio will be silent while the card is scanned.

This simple card – featuring the Braille instructions in English on one side and Spanish on the reverse – has been used by Fairfax County visually impaired voters, offering a more independent voting experience. By empowering voters to more independently cast their ballots, free from interference (however well-meaning), Fairfax County exemplifies the freedom and dignity inherent in the voting process.



Put headphones over your ears to receive audio instructions. To begin voting, insert your card with the corner cut to the front and right as you insert. The card slot is identified with Braille reading, "Card Slot". The audio will be silent while the card is scanned.

[Large area of Braille text, which is mostly illegible due to the image quality.]

Fairfax County Office of Elections
1900 Government Center Parkway, Suite 223
Fairfax, VA 22033
To request reasonable ADA accommodations
Call the Electoral Board 703-324-4755
Fax: 703-324-4706
TTY: 711 (Virginia Relay)
E-mail: elact@fairfaxcounty.gov



Braille Instruction Card - English



Si necesita recibir instrucciones de audio, coloque los auriculares sobre sus oídos. Para comenzar a votar, introduzca su tarjeta con la esquina derecha cortada en la ranura para tarjetas identificadas en Braille con la frase, "Ranura para tarjeta". El audio se mantendrá en silencio mientras la tarjeta se escanea.

Braille text area containing instructions for audio assistance and ballot insertion.

Esmeraldas County Office of Elections
13000 Government Center Parkway, Suite 202
Raleigh, NC 27603
To request reasonable ADA accommodations
Call the General Board 703-224-4722
Fax: 703-224-4736
TTY: 703-224-4736
E-mail: esmer@esmercounty.gov



Braille Instruction Card - Spanish (reverse side)



Ballot card for ExpressVote - notice that the corner cut of the ballot matches the insertion slot on the machine.