

Dear Chair Hardy and Members of the Senate Government Relations Committee,

The National Federation of the Blind of Vermont (NFBVT) is an organization of blind Vermonters, where we have organized ourselves, where we elect our own leaders to speak for us, where we take our own policy stances, and where we tell our elected officials, disability agencies, and service providers what we collectively need. We are connected to a national movement, and we have affiliates in every state.

There may be other organizations claiming to speak for the blind who get involved in this discussion, but please understand the value of the message when we, the blind, speak for ourselves. Our President, Susan Bellimer, of Swanton, is planning to speak today with the Committee via Zoom.

NFBVT supports H.429, which will permit electronic return of vote-by-mail ballots. The language regarding electronic return starts on page 10.

13 other states already have this. Our friends and colleagues in our other affiliates in other states have shared their joy with us about how wonderful it is to have electronic ballot return in vote-by-mail elections. This system can give us access to private, independent voting, as long as this system is made accessible to the blind.

Here are some reasons why NFBVT supports H.429:

- In Vermont, we struggle immensely with public transportation. Vermont creates the illusion of public transportation by having so many GMT buses, but even our buses are not made accessible to blind passengers with the run-of-the-mill automated audible stop announcement systems that are essentially built into the buses out of the factory. Our public transportation is insufficient to get disabled Vermonters to the polls. Because transportation is such a challenge, being able to vote from home and return our ballot electronically gives us access to voting at a much greater level than ever before.
- If the Department of Children and Families has not weaponized our blindness to take our children away from us, we may be at home raising our children, adding to the challenge of who we're bringing on the inaccessible public transit systems, all so that we can go vote.
- For us, the program is private and independent voting. This electronic ballot return system can give Vermonters access to private and independent voting when we would not otherwise have it. We get to make our own selections without anyone else doing it for us, and we can submit our ballots with certainty.
- This system is essentially required by Title II of the ADA. Our current voting system is discriminatory against blind voters. Discriminating against blind voters does not make our elections more secure. There are many best practices that make things secure, like end-to-end encryption, and audits. We, the blind, want our elections to be secure just like everybody else does. Some of us are military veterans who have had the experience of voting similarly while overseas.

We are hopeful that the Committee will help us bring about a day when blind Vermonters have access to private and independent voting. Please support this bill.

Thank you,

Justin Salisbury