

Transcript for CDS webinar probes Delaware's digital primary election pilot

>> VICTOR SCHAFFNER: Welcome to the University of Delaware Center for Disabilities Studies webinar on the state's absentee balloting system, the use of that system by people with disabilities and related accessibility and security issues. I'm Victor Schaffner and today's event is part of the Center's Lunchtime Learning series of events that we host throughout the year that examine policies and programs that support or otherwise significantly impact people with disabilities and their families.

I would like to introduce the members of today's panel.

Anthony Albence is Delaware's election commissioner;

Chris Ramos is the Delaware Department of Elections director of information technology;

Laura Waterland is the Delaware Disabilities Law Program director;

and Virginia Atkinson is the International Foundation for Electoral Systems senior global advisor for inclusion.

Toward the latter portion of today's session, which should end near 1 o'clock, we will pose some of your questions to our panelists. You can send them during today's event through the chat room at the bottom of your screens. Zach Davis, also from the Center for Disabilities Studies, will assist me in fielding those questions.

To start us off, Laura, could you please tell us the ways in which, historically, people with disabilities haven't had equal access when it come to absentee balloting, why that's a significant hardship and also what's inherently inaccessible about paper balloting?

>> LAURA WATERLAND. Okay. I mean, I think, first of all, remember some basic principles about voting access

for people with disabilities. One is that people have the right to vote independently and

privately. And then also that voters with disabilities should have equal access to other voters in terms of technology and ways of voting. Before the Help America Vote Act -- I think this was enacted in 2004, but there was really no federal statute other than ADA that really addressed voting access and the main really important part of HAVA, from our perspective, was the requirement that each state provide at least one accessible voting system.

Delaware was a little bit ahead of the curve with that at the time, because the technology that they had in place actually had -- the machines that they used had some fairly, at the time, advanced accessibility features.

But we never really addressed the absentee voting system. I think Anthony can talk more about how that has developed, actually, with the overseas voting program.

So the big advancement was HAVA and the requirement that there be accessible voting systems in place.

The voting -- the disability vote is actually a pretty substantial vote.

There were 14 million voters with disabilities who voted in 2016.

Based on some numbers, roughly between 15 and 20 percent of Delaware's registered voters have disabilities, which is about 100,000 voters.

So it's actually a fairly significant bloc of people.

Disability voter turn out has always lagged behind voters without disabilities.

That's improved some, I think, with some of these features.

And for many people, going to the polls is a really significant aspect of living in a democracy and people with disabilities want to go to the polls like everybody else.

However, absentee voting is very important for people with disabilities who cannot get to a polling place for whatever reason. There are a lot of barriers to that.

There's transportation issues that are still a major problem for people to get to the polls in a timely manner.

There's people who are just physically uncomfortable going there alone.

There are a bunch of reasons why people might want to vote absentee.

And it's even more important now. I think

Virginia is going to talk about that with the current

situation, in terms of people not really wanting to go to the polls.

>> VICTOR SCHAFFNER: Yes -- >> LAURA WATERLAND: But paper ballots,

to get to paper ballots,

paper ballots are inherently inaccessible to people with certain types of disabilities.

Anybody who has a visual impairment can't vote

independently and privately with a paper ballot.

Anybody who has what we call a print disability -- so, they can't manipulate

a pencil, they can't, for some reason, fill out a ballot physically,

it impacts them.

So, paper balloting by itself is just not accessible

to a large group of people with disabilities. That's why

we think it's so important that there's some electronic capacity there

to get the ballot and fill it out.

>> VICTOR SCHAFFNER: Thank you, Laura. Virginia,

how has the pandemic made absentee balloting even more of

an acute issue for people with disabilities?

>> VIRGINIA ATKINSON: Well, as Laura was mentioning, accessible absentee voting options

mean people with disabilities don't have to navigate inaccessible public transportation,

wait in a queue, worry about the inaccessibility of the polling station once they get there.

IFES, my organization, works mostly abroad. We don't work here in the U.S.

And one of the main things we hear from voters in other countries is that -- voters with disabilities -- that

when they get to the polling station, their right to vote is often even questioned by poll workers.

So having these alternative measures available, where people with disabilities

don't have to deal with any of the discrimination or the inaccessibility, is really important generally.

In the current context, absentee voting provides a way to safely vote

without risking exposure to the virus, which is something I think everyone is concerned with, but many people with disabilities are also immunocompromised or have some other preexisting health condition that might make them particularly at higher risk from the virus, or adverse reactions to the virus.

So avoiding exposure then becomes particularly important.

And in addition to those risks related to the virus, there's also benefits from absentee voting around independence and privacy for some voters with disabilities.

So, for example, if you're voting from home, you can use your own assistive device, like an adaptive keyboard, or software such as a screen reader or voice recognition software to help you mark the ballot, and that's probably not going to be available to you in a polling station.

So here in the U.S., for example, there's an estimated seven million adults that have a visual disability and many advocates are concerned that if there aren't options for people with visual disabilities to vote independently and privately, they might choose to skip voting altogether

rather than risk catching a virus and/or having their ballot privacy compromised if there's not an accessible absentee ballot option.

>> VICTOR SCHAFFNER: Thank you.

So Anthony, earlier this year, as a way to address these and other issues, your department offered up to certain people with disabilities and other Delawareans overseas an internet-based OmniBallot system developed by the tech company Democracy Live out of Seattle.

Can you and Chris take moment to describe the system's accessibility features, which allow people with disabilities to mark and return ballots digitally?

>> ANTHONY ALBENCE: Sure. Thank you.

So the system that is offered, as you mentioned -- and we're always very clear to say, of course it uses the internet, but it's certainly not "internet voting" or anything of that nature, because we like to be very clear about that -- but it is

a means for individuals who are not able to access their ballot in a manner such as you mentioned, individuals with disabilities, those who are -- especially military, as well overseas and maybe serving in forward deployments with limited access.

It gives them the capability to access their ballot and to be connected with adaptive technologies as well to do so and provide various options to return their ballot, including options outside of the realm of mail that is provided as an option.

Mail, email as an attachment, fax -- some people still use fax as well -- and to provide those options.

It's a very easy-to-use system.

It is a very intuitive type of system and that was something that we were looking for.

This system, actually, and the need for it was precipitated by the fact that we had previously an in-house system that we offered which had similar capabilities, but when the state switched over voting equipment last year in 2019 -- that was a complete change-over including the voter registration and the management systems that are kind of the back end operations.

The legacy system was no longer compatible with our new system.

So we had to obtain or connect with an entity that could offer that service.

So we wanted to have a continuation, certainly of the capabilities and the service we provided to the voters

previously.

We didn't want to take a step backwards.

A little bit of history.

As Laura mentioned earlier, being ahead of the curve with some of our equipment, in addition legislatively we've been pretty far ahead.

We are -- our law, Delaware code, provides for electronic delivery and return of absentee ballots for military and overseas voters since 2010 and voters with disabilities since 2012 and we were ahead on that and that's something we want to continue to offer.

I'll pass it to Chris, if I may.

I don't know if you want to speak to anything some more specific about the executive or anything in regards to the accessibility pieces.

>> CHRIS RAMOS: Thank you and thanks for sharing our background on our being in -- as a state and for years we've been trying to comply and adhere to best practices and provide services to our servicemen overseas, our citizens overseas as well as our sick and disabled community.

It's our goal to always make it accessible before coming to our voters and we have demonstrated that for so many years.

You mention we are ahead of the curve in terms of voting technology, long before people wanted to use electronic voting machines.

We were way ahead of that.

We were there for 30 years and while people were going on board of new technology we were moving onto the next generation of technology.

Voting machines that are audible.

ADA-compliant voting machines, for example.

Even the ones we obtain now, people with wheelchairs can roll to the machines that are a certain height where people conveniently vote.

As far as online accessible voting, we started a long time ago with our legacy system, where we started making it available to people overseas and sick and disabled.

We continued on this despite moving out of the legacy system and we lost some capabilities in terms of close integration, basically.

Our legacy systems were closely integrated and they flow and share information closely with new voting machines, with new voter registration systems.

We need to have something that provided the same level of service but maintained the close integration and that's where we parted with Democracy Live, the service we feel to make it available is important.

We can move on to the topic today on where are we with people.

>> VICTOR SCHAFFNER: Thank you.

I know that allowing people to mark their ballots digitally also relieves them from relying on others to mark and return ballots for them.

It provides them with the privacy option that everybody

else has when they vote.

This was another feature that you considered imperative for Delaware as well.

>> ANTHONY ALBENCE: Yes, I can jump in on that.

That's definitely something that we want, to be sure.

Even in a similar vein, even with voting equipment in the polling place, certainly our new voting equipment that has further enhancements as well and accessibility enhancements for voters, we want voters from every background to have the same level of access.

That's something we've been committed to.

Absentee as well as in the polling places -- we don't want voters with a challenge to access some other equipment separate and apart from the voting equipment.

That's not how things should be and that's certainly not how we wanted to operate.

>> VICTOR SCHAFFNER: So we've discussed some of the accessibility features that made Democracy Live and made OmniBallot, as well as you having an interest in these things before you adopted this system, that made it attractive to you, but there also were security concerns and so much so that the Department of Homeland Security and a study by MIT and the University of Michigan called the system "high risk" and vulnerable to undetected hacking and malware and they also said it presented privacy concerns.

Anthony and Chris -- as well as Laura and Virginia, feel free to comment as well -- if you can discuss what made

this system vulnerable in those ways.

>> ANTHONY ALBENCE: Chris, I don't know if you would like to start on that.

I can always jump in as well.

>> CHRIS RAMOS: Thank you, Anthony.

We reviewed the study or analysis of the paper released by the folks at MIT and we take everything seriously.

Not only do we allow people accessibility but we need to make sure it's secure as well.

There's no point in being able to vote when you do not trust the system that allows you to vote.

They needed to come hand-in-hand.

We need to provide balance.

Let's talk about the -- a couple of things that came out from the review and we took them into consideration.

We spoke to all our friends at Democracy Live.

We spoke to our state Department of Technology and Information and reviewed it thoroughly.

We are all in the same space of providing elections -- securing elections and providing flexibility.

This community, we appreciate your interest and participation.

We appreciate MIT's input and the technology side of it.

Because we need to have this conversation because it's important that we all have the good balance of providing secure voting and accessibility.

Let's talk about the recommendations from the MIT folks and about eliminating the electronic ballot return.

DHS, for example, looked at it as a high risk option for electronic return by nature of it being on the internet.

Again, this is -- we cannot equate voting with anything in accounting or business industries.

So we have to take it seriously and after careful consideration we have eliminated the electronic ballot return.

And also other thing -- one thing is for sure, despite all of that.

One thing for sure is the OmniBallot delivery and marking methods have the potential to be valuable for everyone to participate in the election.

We do take all the recommendations seriously and have taken steps on what else can we do to make sure our voters are confident about their votes and to be able to participate and use the tool and that we can continue to offer them the tool providing the content to use it.

> VICTOR SCHAFFNER: Thank you, and I know you got a little bit ahead of some of the chronology that I wanted to also discuss, because I know that while some of our viewers of today's webinar have been following this very closely, some others are hearing about this for the first time.

So after the criticisms came out, many of them earlier this month, initially I know that your office -- Elections -- was still insisting that the system was fit as far as

security is concerned.

But after that last week, the system actually came down for a period of time and as you have been discussing, Chris, more recently, your department spent time reexamining and working on the system, connecting with the folks at MIT, the folks at Democracy Live as you mentioned, to address -- these security issues.

And in the wake of that collaboration over the past several days, two of you, I know, Anthony, maybe you want to have the moment to make this clear to our viewers today of our webinar that you do have a big reveal.

You do have big news that after taking the system down just last week, I think you have something to say.

>> ANTHONY ALBENCE: Sure.

Thanks, Victor.

We did, as you mentioned, out of an abundance of caution and certainly caution from a security standpoint -- elections is always paramount, all-around, certainly in light of various items that were included in the research articles --

we did make a decision to pause our use of the system and what we used that time to do was to consult very closely not only with speaking with the authors of the study and, you know, hearing and talking to them one on one.

Not just reading their research but talking with them and getting their input and their perspective, in

conjunction with our Department of Technology and Information, DTI, with whom we work hand-in-hand with all the the time, and working with our chief information security officer, which is the chief security liaison for the state overall for security, and working with his team and after conversations with the researchers about their findings and, you know, internal conversations with DTI, with the chief information security officer and his group, as I mentioned, we did decide that we could resume use of the system, and we are able to do so making some additional security enhancements to the system.

These are enhancements that we are making now and we are also looking longer-term, you know, as we move forward, past the current cycle.

Because we're still technically in the pilot project for the presidential primary and we're looking to the fall and building on future enhancements.

I may ask Chris again to offer some of the details, if you would like, on that.

Our priority always is a balance.

It's always a balancing act.

Balance availability, convenience, accessibility, with security and we know there are different points of view out there.

We know there are some out in the world in general -- certainly you have and certainly the security concerns, we don't take those lightly by any means.

But we know some people have skepticism around any use of technology around elections but the reality is, we need to use technology, but we need to use it intelligently and appropriately and in a fashion that balances those needs and I think we have a very solid partner in our vendor and extremely sound partners in DTI that we work with daily.

They have confidence in what's happening.

They are walking in lockstep with us and I certainly have full faith behind them that we can make it even more secure while maintaining accessibility.

Chris, if you want to speak to any items we've specifically done.

>> VICTOR SCHAFFNER: Yes, and specifically Chris -- and thank you, Anthony --

specifically, I know that our audience is extremely interested, now that the system is back online, what is the same as before as far as marking and returning ballots and what has changed?

I know you mentioned some things about security, Anthony, so I would like it very much if you could address some of those security enhancements but also, practically speaking, for people who will be accessing this system, what is now available to them as far as marking and returning their ballots?

>> CHRIS RAMOS: Yes.

Thank you for that.

Going back to accessibility and what's available to the public.

Very little has changed as far as where we started two weeks ago and when we resumed Democracy Live for online marking.

So to begin with, how do we communicate to the voter that they are able to go to the website and start retrieving the ballot.

That's the first ballot delivery section.

The ballot delivery section is very important that it cuts down -- it's half the trip.

You don't have to go to the mail or post office or go to your mailbox and pull it out.

We send it to you electrically.

And how does that work?

Once you specify the reasons why you're voting absentee, that triggers the department how you will be receiving the notification.

We communicate to our voters through email.

And the email will state to them, this is where you're going to get your ballot, which is Democracy Live ballot system, and they will be given the information they will be required to provide to the system.

That hasn't changed.

People can still go online and pull it.

The user experience -- and security is more of a back-end process.

From a user perspective, they shouldn't be burdened by security.

It's more about usability.

Even though we implemented additional security measures, the usability shouldn't be impacted or be on the side for that so, in a way, we try to minimize the impact to the voter.

So it's the usual experience, you log in.

You use the vote in the system, which is fully ADA-compliant, so they can use screen readers and things like that and other assistive technologies using the system to mark the ballot like they used to.

There's no difference in that.

The output of that is actually in a summary of their selections.

So that's one thing that was actually highlighted in our assessment and our talks with the MIT folks and as well as with our partners from Democracy Live, that we can provide the service to mark the ballot with a few tweaks in order for it to be included with our security posture.

The outcome was to have a summary of the ballots.

Once they have the marked ballot they can review it and send it back to us.

We still offer a lot of options for the voters.

We still have the regular mail option to return it.

We still provide instructions on which election office to send it based on the county they reside.

They can still send by fax and email.

All those are provided, instruction-wise, where they need to provide it.

We cannot eliminate some parts of the process where

it's paper-based but that's just part of the balancing act between -- we deliver it to you in a secure manner. We provide the ability for you to make your options and voices heard through the ballot.

But there is the other side of the story that it has to come back to us and these are the things available to us right now.

You can send it by mail, by email and by fax.

>> VICTOR SCHAFFNER: Electronic return is the main change before now, correct?

>> ANTHONY ALBENCE: And that's what was identified in the research, the findings and opinion of the researchers, that was identified as the area of high risk, if you will, and again we think that our partners at DTI agree with us on this, is that we're able to balance providing all the other functionality, even if we don't have the online return option, and that helps to minimize and address what is considered the high "risk."

>> VICTOR SCHAFFNER: Anthony, how will the department and state go about informing people now about the availability of this system, and it's my understanding that it's available to more people than originally designed, basically, now with the pandemic, it's now anyone who is social distancing can be doing this kind of absentee balloting as well as visiting polling places if they wish.

Up until now, the system has been underused, I believe only a few thousand people have accessed it so far.

So how are you all going to promote it so that people know it's out there and they can access it?

>> ANTHONY ALBENCE: We will be working with our partners here to do some outreach about the accessibility features of it and also working to enhance the visibility on our sites in terms of how it is available.

And as you mentioned -- I know that's an area that some people also, you know, perhaps, have had concerns about that there is a wide use.

The way Delaware law is written, the availability of the electronic delivery and return is afforded to those who, as the code language says, those who are sick and disabled and there is no restriction on that.

And there is no requirement for any sort of documentation or things like that other than identifying yourself under the provisions of the current state of emergency that is in effect now that clarified reasons around COVID-19 being considered an acceptable circumstance to utilize the existing reason of sick or having a disability.

So, yeah, we're -- unlike some other states, some other states have more stringent requirements.

Perhaps they require documentation for other reasons.

Delaware hasn't had that for many years.

In recent memory we haven't had the requirements.

It is an affirmation by the voter that they are

qualified.

> VICTOR SCHAFFNER: Let's talk about the future, about the future of this and remote accessible systems in Delaware in general.

This is offered for the July primary, but what about the general election in November and the elections beyond then?

Anthony, how is your office looking at the future as far as this system and systems like it are concerned?

>> ANTHONY ALBENCE: Well, as I mentioned a little earlier, we're working really closely with our partners at DTI for how we will offer these services, you know, through the fall and really long-term permanently.

What's the best way to do that?

Again, functionally, I don't think it will really appear in a significant way differently to voters.

There may be more back-end options that are the security enhancements that we'll be continuing to work on.

And we'd like to also explore options for additional validations, you know, perhaps as available to the voters.

You know, are there options down the line?

Again, this will take a little bit more development and won't impact usability.

Will there be ability to offer voters ways to verify their choices, things of that nature.

That's something we want to offer to voters, especially

when they're using a new technology when they're not, for example, seeing a physical ballot in their hand, so to speak.

We would like to work on options where we can provide that capability.

That's a little bit over the longer term.

But we're certainly very much fully committed to providing the service.

We just want to continue to do it in as convenient and secure of a way and in a way that gives as much reassurance to the voters, too.

>> VICTOR SCHAFFNER: Thank you.

So Laura, from what you've heard, what do you believe needs to happen to make the system more accessible, and Laura and Virginia, what are the other ways that you believe the state can go about making absentee balloting more accessible?

>> LAURA WATERLAND: Well, I think from the disability perspective --

I have to remind people that accessibility is a legal requirement.

I think that it's important -- not to throw the baby out with the bathwater when it comes to security versus accessibility.

Disenfranchising a lot of people -- I think Anthony's approach has been measured, that they've done the work instead of trying to knock systems down, which is what Professor Halderman has been doing and it's work -- he's from Michigan, yeah.

He's a very loud critic of internet voting but I don't know that he's thought about coming up with solutions and I think Delaware's approach, which is addressing security concerns and coming up with solutions, is where the emphasis needs to be.

I want to point out there's litigation involving Pennsylvania's voting machine, and there was an opinion earlier in the year, the judge indicated a lot of what the cyber concerns are, are fantasy and very small risk.

I think we need to keep that in perspective and there needs to be balance, but not to the point where you're disenfranchising persons with disabilities.

Even with somebody who is visually impaired and doesn't have a printer -- I guess if they have a computer that's great, but they might have a device they can't use the system on.

I think you need to continue evolving the systems for people to vote.

Delaware is in the minority in the regard -- there's other legislative things to be done to improve accessibility for everybody.

>> VICTOR SCHAFFNER: Virginia, do you have thoughts about how the state can make absentee voting more accessible?

>> VIRGINIA ATKINSON: I think Anthony brought up the issue of verifiability and that's the future we're looking towards working, which I think is great.

We find internationally with paper ballots, people tend to trust the chain of custody, from when they mark it

to when they put it in the ballot box to when it's counted --

at least in the U.S. and Europe. In some other countries, the moment the ballot leaves the polling station, people don't trust it any more at all.

Whether that method of leaving is physically the paper ballot leaving, or if it's leaving via the internet. So I think it's really important to have contextualized solutions. And that will help to build trust in the EMB, and hopefully in the democracy and the country.

The way it's being approached here, using local solutions and taking advantage of the public trust here in Delaware is great and makes sense.

>> VICTOR SCHAFFNER: Yes, thank you.

There's also of course a flip-side concern that is, more attention and access given to absentee and remote voting, that in-person voting at polling places can be neglected.

I know you have some expertise in that area, and some thoughts you'd like to share.

>> VIRGINIA ATKINSON: I think that all measures that are open to the general public, whether that be remote voting options or in-person voting options, need to be made accessible to people with disabilities.

We find often in other countries that alternative voting measures that are developed are used as a substitute to making a polling station accessible, rather than as an addition. So, for example, there's many things you can do in the polling station to make sure that voters that do want to go to the polling station and vote alongside everyone else have an option to do that. Polling stations could have electronic voting machines where voters can plug in their own headsets.

We see use widely of tactile ballot guides, so that voters who are blind can vote on their own and in secret. And tactile ballot guides can be developed

either with a Braille option, like, for example, Tunisia does, or a tactile option with dots that are raised, which is done in Sierra Leone, or for example, in the U.K. they have both. So their tactile ballot guides have both raised dots that you can follow or Braille, so it doesn't matter if someone has Braille literacy or not. They can still vote on their own, in secret, in the polling station.

There's also countries that have large font ballots, or in Armenia, for example, they have magnifying sheets that are at every polling station for all voters to use. That also helps people that might not self-identify as having a disability, like older people, but could still benefit from that assistive device.

Cost Rica, they have large-grip pencils to help you mark your ballot if you have a dexterity disability. So there's many options within a traditional polling station setting that can help enhance accessibility. There's also alternatives like mobile ballot boxes.

They're commonly used in countries all around the world, but with the virus that might not be, perhaps, the best method right now.

That said, we just supported elections in Serbia this past weekend, on Sunday they had parliamentary elections there, and they did use a tactile ballot guide.

And they had strict guidance both for the mobile ballot box teams and for the voters — that everyone had to have masks on, and gloves, but what we heard is that the officially-issued masks were really very uncomfortable, and the poll workers and those using the mobile ballot boxes in particular were not comfortable wearing them all day, so maybe weren't as strict keeping them on as they should be, so that's something I think that we need to think about as more and more elections are beginning to move forward while we're still in the middle of this pandemic.

And then, here in the U.S., postal voting is another option

that's being explored, but also it's not always accessible for everybody.

One last thing that is done in many countries and here in the U.S. is advance voting.

But something that's unique is, in the Philippines, for example,

you can go vote if you have a disability in a shopping mall,

because shopping malls are usually some of the most accessible buildings around.

You can also register to vote in the mall.

So that's something that is — I don't know why we don't all do that,

rather than having to find some random administrative building or some school that you're not familiar with, I think

everybody knows where the mall is, and usually they're accessible.

So the best solution, I'd say, is really to mix all these measures,

so voters can approve — choose the approach that best suits them.

>> ANTHONY ALBENCE: Victor — I'm sorry to jump in, Victor, if we have a minute,

could I just actually make a quick comment, or just augment

what Virginia was saying, as well, just kind of talking very briefly about

our in-polling place accessibility features as well.

I can keep it real brief. Like I mentioned earlier, we've always been committed —

even with our legacy, our old voting machines —

we've never had a mindset of having a separate set of machines that are accessible.

And our new machines, just because of the newer technology,

they have a lot of additional features that we did not offer previously on screens.

We have the ability to display in large fonts,

we have the ability for contrast — black and white versus color.

The universal voting console device, that's available — and again, anyone

can use the universal voting console without any question,

and they're available in every polling place. They have a lot of tactile items

on them, as well as Braille — raised edges, different shaped buttons,

also has an input for other assistive devices like sip-and-puff that we never had previously.

And again, they're fully accessible in each machine.

And what's also a nice step forward versus our previous accessibility module in the machine is you can dip in and dip out of that. Like I said, in addition to anyone being able to use it. Previously, if you used our — what we called our ADA module, or ADAM — at that point, you — and I know Laura and others will remember this, I'm sure, from seeing it — you were pretty much committed. Once you started it, you pretty much had to go through the whole process. What's nice about these devices is that you can — we can plug this into a machine and then you can dip in and out, either using the UVC console or just going right back to the screen if you'd like to use it that way, and again, the audio presentation of the ballot. So it's — we're really happy with some of the additional features we have on the new machines in the polling places. And they're available everywhere. And again, anyone is welcome to use them. And even if you just want to try them, even if someone who may not necessarily have a need to use them, we welcome you to try them in a polling place, just to kind of get the experience.

>> LAURA WATERLAND: Just to jump in for a second.

I think that the equipment is great. I mean, we — we monitor polling places on election days.

And I think the concern — what we see is more of an issue, the quality control issues and accessibility on election day, in terms of making sure the polling places themselves are visibly accessible and the poll workers are trained. That's an ongoing thing. But I think that, particularly with the new machine has outstanding accessibility. It's just the other aspects of it that we need to continue to work, I think.

>> ANTHONY ALBENCE: Mhmm. Of course.

>> VICTOR SCHAFFNER: Thank you all for addressing all of these questions up to now.

I'd like, however, to turn this over to questions from our audience, so Zach, I know that they've been coming in throughout our program.

If you would, please dip into them and ask our panelists what's on the mind of our audience.

>> ZACHARY DAVIS: Certainly. First question goes to Laura.

What is "no excuse absentee balloting"?

>> LAURA WATERLAND: Means anybody can get — currently, and it's in the Constitution, unfortunately, in Delaware,

currently only people with physical disabilities and who are sick — there are

specific categories of people who get absentee ballots.

Other people cannot. If it's no excuse, it literally means that— it's no excuse.

Anybody can get one. You don't have to give a reason or fall into a particular category.

>> ZACHARY DAVIS: Thank you. This is for Anthony and Chris.

The current ballot return system used, you mentioned, is email, but that has inherent risks as well.

What security measures are in place to reduce those risks?

>> ANTHONY ALBENCE: Chris, you want to jump in on that? Go ahead.

>> CHRIS RAMOS: Yes. Thank you for the question. It has inherent risk, and that's certainly true for any technology — anything that involves technology.

And we do — we approach them two ways.

So number one, when you receive your ballot, and I'll bring back what Anthony was mentioning about

end-to-end verification. It's something we're looking into down the line

to make sure that what you have is what we got,

and anything in between is actually of no use.

So basically, initially, in the short term, we do offer

the ability to use the state's secure mail service.

As far as we know, this is the best option we have available to feel confident that there is the integrity and confidentiality of the email, of the attachment they're sending. Again, in terms of technology, as the study will have shown you, that it's hard to tell what the experience is — what the endpoint is, or what the users are experiencing on their end.

It's hard for departments like us or organizations providing services to their constituents, to know definitely what the computer — the status of the computers of the people using them. It's hard to say whether, are they infected? or not infected? But one thing's for sure: that they need to be able to read and see and confirm what their selections are and that — be able to confirm with us that what we got is how they intended to order their ballots.

So we do have security capabilities at the moment and we're also looking to end-to-end verification sometime down the line. I think Virginia and Anthony touched on those a little bit earlier on. Thank you.

>> ZACHARY DAVIS: Thanks very much. Next question, I think, also goes, well, mostly to you, Anthony.

Has Delaware considered the Maryland solution to ballot delivery, which is to say, a voter-trusted agent returns the ballot for people with disabilities.

>> ANTHONY ALBENCE: Delaware law doesn't have any restrictions in terms of who can provide a ballot, who can return a ballot.

So someone can, essentially, have a trusted agent as well. And sometimes we'll see that, you know, a family member,

spouse, parent returning for a child, as well.

So that would not be prohibited per our current law, certainly.

Our law doesn't speak to it at all, but

in not speaking to it, it's certainly not prohibited.

>> LAURA WATERLAND: But you wouldn't want to — this is Laura — you wouldn't want to rely on that.

That's an option for somebody,

but there have to be other options that allow people to vote independently and privately.

>> ANTHONY ALBENCE: Right, exactly. That's a good point.

>> VIRGINIA ATKINSON: France, for example, allows proxy voting, which, you always need multiple options, but this I have a lot of concerns with that.

Proxy voting can really be abused. By proxy voting I mean

not just returning the ballot for someone else where they marked it themselves, but

someone else actually going to the polling station and marking the ballot for you, in your place.

That, I think, is problematic.

>> ANTHONY ALBENCE: [chuckles]

>> ZACHARY DAVIS: So, next question. Virginia, while Delaware is making strides in terms of eliminating paper ballots,

other states and other countries may not be making those strides.

In your experience, what have you seen

that has been effective in terms of community advocacy

to eliminate paper balloting, or to make voting more accessible generally?

>> VIRGINIA ATKINSON: I'd say the best example is in Australia, in New South Wales.

Australia is unique in that voting is mandatory there.

So it's not like here and many other countries where you vote if you want, you don't vote if you want.

Australia, Peru, quite a few countries around the world

mandate voting. If you don't vote, you have to pay a fine.

So, in Australia they've been really active in trying to

ensure that there are accessible ways for people to vote — for everyone to vote.

So since 2011 there, they've had a system

where voters with disabilities can either call in with their vote, or now they do have an electronic ballot delivery system as well. So that's something that I think is particularly interesting, especially the call-in option.

That might be something that could be used in other countries.

Estonia has all internet voting for all voters. Everything is online.

But for the most part, in the countries where IFES is working, internet voting or online return options of your ballot are not available.

We're really focused on making the polling station accessible and having alternative measures like the mobile ballot box.

>> ZACHARY DAVIS: So in those countries, like Estonia and New South Wales in Australia, have those changes — the move towards more electronic voting systems — have those come from the top down or have them come through community advocacy?

>> VIRGINIA ATKINSON: Australia, I'm very familiar — I'm more familiar with that context than Estonia. Estonia, I think, it was more the government — there's wide internet penetration in the whole country and so the government was able to make the switch for all voters to vote online, and there's also a high level of public trust there, so that maybe came more organically.

In Australia, it was very much advocacy from the disability rights community, saying, if voting is mandatory, and we do want to participate and we do want to vote, then we need to have accessible options.

So, one was from the disability community and the other was, maybe, more — my understanding, at least — from the government.

>> ZACHARY DAVIS: Thank you. Next question is following up, Anthony, on looking forward to the presidential election this November. If the current bill to expand vote-by-mail is passed, would it be possible for some sort of information sheet to be sent out along with ballot applications to outline

possibilities for — current possibilities for voters with disabilities?

>> ANTHONY ALBENCE: Yeah, there'll be — we will have information that goes out with the mailings, so we can certainly look at putting that in there.

>> ZACHARY DAVIS: Those are the questions I've received so far. Anyone else who has questions please use the chat feature and type them in.

Here we are.

Were you aware that part of the report

issued by MIT and the University of Michigan talked about voters' data privacy

and some of their personal voting information being exposed to employees from Democracy Live?

Are you aware if Democracy Live has updated that privacy policy?

>> CHRIS RAMOS: Thank you for the question. Very good question, actually.

Democracy Live has taken that — it's an action item for them. We have spoken

to them and we have constant communication with Democracy Live

and they have taken that recommendation very seriously

and they are in the process of — if they haven't done so yet —to put the privacy policy out there, yes.

>> ZACHARY DAVIS: Thank you. So as of this moment, what is the

Department of Elections' current — not policy, but

how does the Department of Elections interact with stakeholders in the disability community to find out

where there are possible areas that need to be addressed in terms of accessibility?

>> ANTHONY ALBENCE: Well I think we have pretty regular communication. We can always

have more communications, I think, forums like this. I've

known and worked with Laura over the years in my previous position in elections,

and with our work on polling place accessibility, and there are other means.

I'm certainly always available and willing to have conversations in whatever forum.

Certainly by any means, because we want to hear what's out there

and do our best to try to meet the needs, absolutely.

>> ZACHARY DAVIS: How specifically can the disability community be helpful to you?

What kind of feedback is most valuable as you move forward?

>> ANTHONY ALBENCE: Any thoughts, ideas — we can't implement everything, certainly, but

we certainly are willing and happy to hear ideas.

If there's anything collaboratively we can do, working together, helping getting the word out, assisting in any way that we can to share information.

I think just having an ongoing dialogue and just being as collaborative as we can going forward and continuing.

>> ZACHARY DAVIS: Laura, for our viewers from out-of-state, what are some accessibility issues that disability rights groups are addressing in other states' voting systems?

>> LAURA WATERLAND: Well actually, there's been some litigation in the last — because a bunch of states have run the primaries over the same circumstances that we're in, in terms of dealing with discouraging people from actually going to physical polling places and voting from home. So a lot of states have expanded their absentee balloting or done kind of an emergency mail-in balloting. And there was litigation in Michigan and New York and Pennsylvania recently involving providing an accessible option for individuals with disabilities to vote absentee or by mail-in. That's continuing in other states as well. Minnesota is currently being reviewed just to make sure that they're providing an accessible option for people with disabilities to vote either absentee or by mail-in. So it's kind of an ongoing issue. I think we're lucky in Delaware that we have a unified system. There's one machine that's used in every single polling place. >> ANTHONY ALBENCE [off-screen]: Mhmm. Yeah. It's a huge advantage to the kind of patchwork systems that you see in other states.

I know some of my colleagues in other states have had much more to deal with than I've had to deal with. Kind of gives us — me the luxury of dealing with some of these other issues in more detail. But I think it's important that we remain vigilant in terms of registration, there's accessibility issues around registration.

And then there's around voting. Like I said, what we focus on a lot during election years is the physical accessibility of polling places.

Obviously, that's not as big a — that may not be as big an issue this year, because there won't be as many, but, you know, sort of ongoing vigilance in that regard.

Like I said, Delaware's — it's just a different

set of challenges in Delaware than in other states, to some degree.

>> VICTOR SCHAFFNER: Thank you. Thank you, everyone. We are at — virtually at the end of our hour. The hour sped by.

I just want to add a few things at the end.

Everyone who is part of our audience today will be receiving an evaluation form.

We ask you to fill it out and return it to us later today about the webinar that you just viewed.

Also, I would like to thank very much all of our panelists today: Virginia Atkinson, Christopher Ramos, Anthony Albence and Laura Waterland.

And unlike Australia, we cannot mandate that you vote

in the primary, but we nevertheless encourage you to do so, both in the primary

and then again in November for the general election. Thank you very much for joining us today.