

## **The importance of voting on November 6 Much is at stake for the disability community**

by Michael Forbes Wilcox

### **Never Underestimate the Power of Your Vote**

Many elections are decided by only a few votes. Recently, in one contest for the Massachusetts House, the election ended in a tie! Any seasoned observer of the political scene will agree that we should never take any election for granted. Enthusiasm can win an election, just as apathy can lose it.

### **Never Underestimate the Power of Community**

According to the most recent data available from the US Census Bureau, nearly 20% of the country's population self-reports being disabled. Almost 30% of all households have at least one member who is disabled. Add in other relatives, friends, and support networks, and it's pretty clear that people who care about disability issues are a huge percentage of the voting population.

### **Educate Yourself on the Issues and the Candidates**

Knowledge is power! There are many issues, critical to the disability community, being debated in this election cycle. At the national level (including the Presidential election as well as the race for US Senator in Massachusetts), policies and programs around such things as Medicare, Medicaid (MassHealth), and Social Security are all very important to people with disabilities. Find out what positions each candidate has on these key issues. There are many other issues as well, including full funding for the IDEA (special education act) and the recently enacted Affordable Care Act (healthcare reform).

Of concern to many in the disability community is the Congressional House Ways and Means Committee's proposal that would have a dramatic impact on long-term care for individuals with disabilities. Regardless of where you stand on the political spectrum, you need to be aware of the implications of this proposal for people with disabilities. According to The Arc (US), key elements would be:

- \* An \$810 billion cut in Medicaid over 10 years (a 33% cut);
- \* Medicaid would be converted to a block grant to the states;
- \* The elderly and individuals with disabilities represent 25% of Medicaid beneficiaries, but represent 2/3 of Medicaid spending. A 33% cut to the Medicaid budget would disproportionately affect individuals with disabilities."

There are also many local races, like those for Massachusetts Senator and Representative seats, that will elect people who will have a say in how the Bay State budget looks in the coming years.

In addition, there are three ballot initiatives (questions) to vote on this year, including one on assisted suicide, which some disability groups oppose.

### **Know How You're Going to Vote Before You Get to the Polling Place**

You should have your mind made up before you cast your ballot, whether it is at a voting (polling) place, or by absentee ballot. This will reduce the stress of the process and ensure that your vote is used to best advantage.

## Resources

Most disability groups have positions on issues that are important to them. By law, however, they cannot support candidates directly, so you will need to get that information from other sources.

If you have access to the internet, there are plenty of websites that have information on the voting process, the issues, and the candidates. A list is provided for some of these at the end of this article. A simple web search will find many more.

Also, the Disability Law Center (DLC) of Massachusetts ([dlc-ma.org](http://dlc-ma.org)) has a Voter Hotline. Call 1-800-872-9992 anytime to get information on the mechanics of voting, and on election day, you can call if you have any problems with getting to your polling place (they can arrange a ride) or if you encounter any barriers to voting, such as accessibility, or language, or anything else.

Here is a short selection of the many topics covered on the DLC website:

- ⤴ You must be registered to vote. Call the DLC or your town or city clerk for more information. Braille forms are available from the DLC. You can also get detailed information on the state website at <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/eleifv/howreg.htm> or phone 1-800-392-6090
- ⤴ The deadline for registering is October 17. You can register in person or you can request a form by mail.
- ⤴ You can vote by absentee ballot if you expect that on Election Day (November 6) you will not be able to get to your polling place in person.
- ⤴ All voting (polling) places must be fully accessible, including the voting booth.
- ⤴ You have the right to be assisted, and to be free of intimidation or discrimination.
- ⤴ Voters under guardianship still have the right to vote unless the guardianship was set up to expressly take away this right (that is rare).

## Website (Internet) Links

**Secretary of the Commonwealth**, Elections Division has lots of information, including where you vote, how to vote by absentee ballot, and the ballot questions: <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/ele/>

**Disability Law Center** <http://www.dlc-ma.org/> then click on "Information" and then "Voting"

**The Arc of the US-** has a page with links to many issues that affect people with disabilities: <http://www.thearc.org/page.aspx?pid=2669>

**The National Disability Rights Network** has a page on their website with links to 15 different areas of concern: <http://www.napas.org/en/issues.html>

**The Boston Globe** offers a voter's guide that will list which candidates are on the ballot at your polling place, and gives information on their backgrounds and positions, with links to campaign websites, when available. <http://c3.thevoterguide.org/v/boston12/>

Finally, feel free to call on me. If I can't answer your question, I will find someone who can. My email is [mfw@mfw.us](mailto:mfw@mfw.us) and on Twitter I'm [@mfwilcox](https://twitter.com/mfwilcox).

*Editor's Note: Michael Forbes Wilcox, a resident of western Massachusetts, is a member of the Massachusetts Special Commission Relative to Autism, the Board of Directors of the Asperger's Association of New England (AANE), and the Executive Committee of Advocates for Autism of Massachusetts (AFAM)*

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