

Our reference: PF:FG:762

21 June 2012

The Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament of New South Wales
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam:

Question on Notice: Are there lessons to be learned from other jurisdictions to help persons with disability participate in voting

1. We were asked by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters at its public hearing on 15 June 2012, whether there are any lessons to be learned from other jurisdictions to help persons with disability participate in voting. This question was taken on notice as it was necessary to conduct research in order provide the Committee with a full and proper answer.
2. In relation to the participation of persons with cognitive disability in voting the United Kingdom have had some innovative approaches. A power of attorney is able to vote on the person's behalf if they have been appointed proxy on a form signed by the person.¹ They provide voting information in easy English. This is also provided by the state Oregon in the USA.
3. In regards to general enhancement of participation of persons with disability in voting Canada has introduced some useful reforms. These include the introduction of public education and information programs for persons with disability, including the use of alternative formats such as Braille, large print and audio-cassettes and accessibility training and awareness sessions for returning officers². In addition, the federal law provides that a deputy returning officer may appoint and swear in a sign language interpreter to assist the

¹ Voting in elections for disabled voters

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/disabledpeople/everydaylifeandaccess/everydayaccess/dg_4018637

² Prince, M.J., "Persons with Disabilities and Canada's Electoral Systems Gradually Advancing the

Democratic Right to Vote" in Electoral Insights (April 2004)

http://www.elections.ca/res/eim/article_search/article.asp?id=15&lang=e&frmPageSize=

officer in communicating to an elector any information that is necessary to enable him or her to vote.³

4. In the United States the Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act 1984 requires polling booths to be accessible in Federal Elections.
5. Please contact Fiona Given at fgiven@disabilitylaw.org.au if you would like to discuss this submission further.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'FG', is enclosed in a light grey rectangular box.

FIONA GIVEN
Policy Officer

³ *ibid.*,