

# SUMMARY OF ELECTION ADMINISTRATION POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FINDINGS

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MILITARY HEROES INITIATIVE  
U. S. Election Assistance Commission

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Operation BRAVO  
Foundation

# Military Heroes Initiative Overview

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Research objective:

Identify potential ways to improve voting procedures and technology for veterans with disabilities

Target population:

Transitioning and recently retired and separated military with service-related disabilities

Focus:

Veterans in residential treatment facilities

# Veteran Transition Challenges

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- Undergoing medical treatment and/or rehabilitation
- Learning to cope with disability condition
- Making life style and family adjustments
- Leaving military/returning to civilian life
- Using different voting procedures

# Election Administration Challenges

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- Voter may not be “in the system”
- Voter may be absent from voting residence
- Voter may be transient
- Target population reflects large variety of disability conditions

# Research Topics

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- Election administration practices
- Voting assistance services
- Ballot delivery options for veterans in treatment facilities

# Election Administration Practices

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*What election administration practices are in place to support accessible voting?*

Methodology:

- Conducted survey of 55 states and territories on accessibility practices
- Reviewed 54 Secretary of State websites
- Reviewed State of Georgia practices

# Conducting Elections Is Complicated

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## Constitutional provisions

- “The times, places and manner of holding elections...shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof...”
- “No State shall...deny to any person...the equal protection of the laws.”

## Federal statutes pertaining to accessible voting

- Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped
- The Americans with Disabilities Act
- The Help America Vote Act

## State laws and procedures

- Some commonalities, but also considerable variation

# Common Practices\*

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- All polling places fully accessible or provide ADA-compliant alternatives (47)
- At least one accessible voting device (45)
- Permit personal assistance with voter registration application (45)
- Permit personal assistance with absentee ballot application (47)
- Permit personal assistance with polling place and absentee voting (47)
- No fault absentee voting/disability as a reason (47)

\* Based on 47 survey responses



# Use of Websites for Application Forms and Ballot Delivery\*

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- Voter registration form posted online (41)
- Voter registration submitted online (9)
- Absentee ballot request form posted online (39)
- Ballot request submitted online (15)
- Download ballots from website (8)

\* Based on 47 responses

# Use of Websites for Voter Information\*

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- 8 states have very informative webpages for voters with disabilities
- 31 provide limited information
- 15 provide no information about accessible voting

\* Based on review of 54 Secretary of State websites

# Examples of Website Best Practices

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- California: State webpage provides portal to all 58 counties. LA County has online election guide for voters with special needs. Madera County has online graphics and text instructions for using their accessible voting device. Santa Cruz County has online guide and a video on accessible polling place setup.
- Connecticut: Provides videos of accessible voting devices

## Examples (Cont'd)

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- Idaho: Accessibility webpage provides graphic and audio (MP3) information on accessible voting options and ballot marking instructions. Also videos of Secretary of State using the ballot marking device, demonstration of an audio ballot, voters with disabilities encouraging others to vote.

# Examples (Cont'd)

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- North Carolina: Contains photos of every voting location to show best way to enter.
- South Carolina: Provide online video for voters; online training videos for poll managers on serving voters with disabilities.
- Washington: Developed a website with disability community stakeholders to provide a range of information

# Voting in Group Living Facilities

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- 31 states have provisions for nursing homes
- 28 have provisions for assisted living centers
- 27 have provisions for hospitals
- 23 have provisions for VA facilities

# State Level Coordination with VA

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- VA interviews suggest limited interaction between election offices and VA facilities
- Survey responses were somewhat mixed:
  - 27 states said they worked with VA
  - 19 responded that they did not

# Election Administration Recommendations

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- All states should post voter registration forms and absentee ballot request forms online
- All states should have information on their elections website specifically for voters with disabilities
- EAC should conduct a roundtable to share website best practices for voters with special needs



# Voting Assistance Services

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*What voting assistance services are available to accommodate needs of veterans with disabilities?*

Methodology:

- Reviewed voting assistance materials from DoD, VA, EAC, and NASS
- Interviewed VA Voluntary Service Office personnel
- Reviewed survey responses and Georgia practices

# Examples of Voting Assistance Services

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## Voter education:

- Ensuring that veterans with disabilities know their voting rights
- Providing information about general voting process
- Providing information about a specific election

# Examples (Cont'd)

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## Voter registration:

- Determining if veteran is registered
- Ensuring voter registration is current
- Assisting with registration process
  - where is veteran eligible to vote
  - obtaining, completing and submitting registration form and any required supporting documentation

# Examples (Cont'd)

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## Voting:

- Obtaining, completing and submitting absentee ballot request
- Reading and/or marking the ballot
- Completing voter affidavit, privacy waiver, assistant identification
- Assembling and returning absentee ballot packet

# Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

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- Policy directive affirms VA's commitment to providing voting assistance to patients
- Applies to residents in community living centers and other VA facilities
- Each facility director must have a published policy to include providing registration and absentee voting assistance for patients unable to leave a facility

# VA Voting Assistance

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- Assistance provided almost entirely by volunteers
- Only one of many duties they perform
- Provided with checklist, but very little training
- Assistance may only be provided to residents of the state where facility is located
- VA website references EAC website for voting information

# Voting Assistance Recommendations

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- State election offices and VA facilities should develop uniform procedures for providing voting assistance in VA facilities
- Election Assistance Commission (EAC) should provide federal level coordination with VA to facilitate these efforts
- State election offices should provide online training for VA personnel providing voting assistance

# Voting Assistance Recommendations (Cont'd)

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- In its role as a national clearinghouse on election administration, the EAC should develop a web portal to link voters with disabilities and their caregivers with state and local sources of voting information



# Ballot Delivery Options for Veterans in Treatment Facilities

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*How to address HAVA mandate for voting systems to be accessible for individuals with disabilities and enable them to vote privately and independently ?*

Methodology:

- Outlined 4 absentee delivery methods
- Convened assessment panel to evaluate
- Prepared plan to test selected method

# Selected Method

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- Supervised absentee voting using electronic ballot delivery and marking device
- Description:
  - Trained voting assistants assigned to VA facilities to provide voter information and education
  - Equipped with portable electronic ballot delivery and marking device and printer

# Rationale

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- Electronic ballot delivery direct to voter by email or website download provides more accessibility options than paper ballot but less versatile and user friendly than electronic ballot device
- More potential security threats with unsupervised absentee voting
- More system elements to manage with email/web server delivery

# Rationale (Cont'd)

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- More voting assistance needed to foster voter participation
- Many voters will continue to need some assistance with voting
- Oregon experienced significant accessibility improvement using an iPad as a ballot delivery and marking device

# Rationale (Cont'd)

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- Minimal impact on administrative complexity because procedures already in place for electronic ballot delivery for UOCAVA voters
- Significant staffing impact could potentially be addressed by using veterans as voting assistants

# Pilot Features

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- On-site trained voting assistants
- Low cost, commercially available ballot delivery device
  - many accessibility features built-in
  - interfaces for personal assistive technology
- Automated aids for voter familiarization
- Use of accessible design principles for ballot presentation

# Pilot Scope

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- Employs both procedural and technology innovations
- Designed for Georgia, but adaptable for use in other states
- Only Georgia voters eligible to participate

# In Conclusion

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- Many opportunities to adjust election administration practices and procedures to better assist veterans with disabilities
- Low cost to implement, low cost to maintain