# DO Network Logo Disability Organizing Network REV UP! Logo Register! Educate! Voter! Use your Power! Make the Disability Vote Count

# REV UP!

# Registering to Vote and Accessibility Barriers

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**Presented by:**

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**Speakers:**

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Kathleen Unger, VoteRiders

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>> TED JACKSON: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Ted Jackson with the Disability Organizing Network at California Foundation for Independent Living Centers. The Disability Organizing Network is a network of approximately 30 disability community advocates and community organizers at the independent living centers across the state of California. We have 1,500 volunteers that work on advocacy to improve access in all aspects of life for people with disabilities.

We like to say that we organize for accessible communities wherever people with disabilities live, work, learn, shop, play and vote. We’re gonna get started shortly, but I want to hand it off to Zach Baldwin from the American Association of People with Disabilities and the REV UP campaign.

>> ZACH BALDWIN: Great thank you so much, Ted. Hi everyone. Thank you for joining today’s webinar. Today's webinar is brought to you by the Disability Organizing Network and the REV UP campaign. The REV UP campaign was launched by the American Association of People with Disabilities in 2016. It's a nonpartisan initiative that coordinates with national, state and local disability organizations to increase the political power of the disability community while also engaging candidates and the media on disability issues. The campaign focuses on voter registration, education, access and engagement. REV UP stands for Register! Educate! Vote! Use your Power! This is the first of a series of webinars focused on access barriers to the voting process. Our next webinar will be coming up towards the end of September and will focus on barriers to voter education materials offered by election officials as well as campaign. Stay tuned for more information on that. Today we’ve got a great lineup of speakers, including Veda Florez with the League of Women Voters, Kathleen Unger with VoteRiders and Paul Spencer with Disability Rights California. We’ll have time for questions toward the end. For now, I will turn it over to our first speaker. Veda, please go ahead.

>> VEDA FLOREZ: Good afternoon. My name is Veda Florez. I am pleased to be here today. I’m a lifelong volunteer of the League of Women Voters of the Bay Area as Communications Director. My day job is with the Marin County Elections Department where I work as Communication Outreach Consultant serving underserved communities, those alternately abled and youth voters. I would like to thank everyone for attending the webinar. And thank Ted Jackson, the DO Network and the team at REV UP. Next slide, please.

I want to thank everyone for their hard work during the National Disability Voter Registration Week in July. Here in my county, Marin County, California, we held seven different events registering over 30 people. I want to tell everybody, it's not the number of people that we registered to vote, but it's the number of people that we engaged. We engaged over 250 people bringing forward the conversation that every voice counts. It's important for everyone to participate in the process. Whether you’re just reading the paper or talking to other people or going to city council meetings, you are engaging in the process. Today we'll discuss doing your homework, where to go and what to do, where is the best location? Is it better to have a traditional tabling event or would it be better to create packets and give packets away to individuals and challenging them to register five people. Creating partnerships is excellent. The League of Women Voters is available in every single state in the U.S. with several different local Leagues that are trained to work with you and help you in your voter registration drives.

We want to give people choices, and the best way to do that is reaching out peer-to-peer. Peer-to-peer contact, inviting some youths if you are going to a college, inviting youth. If you are going to other locations, make sure to have someone that looks like the people who will most likely be at that location. We want to make sure that you know what you can offer. Train your volunteers, and remind them that election laws have changed across the United States, and there are great opportunities for you to expand your outreach. Today we’ll talk about tricks of the trade, what to say to engage people, how to engage new voters and those that are not yet citizens. Finally, we want to have the opportunity to offer you suggestions for the new voter. Where to get information, how to find a ride, is voting by mail the best choice for you, and what to do afterwards? Do you bring a signup sheet with you to engage them in your organization? Or do you just let them drop? I know that the REV UP community is all about registering, educating and voting. We want to usher people through the process of voter registration up to voting. Next slide, please.

Firstly we want you to do your homework. Consider the traditional tabling experience where you set up a table outside a high traffic area or do you want to create the packets like I mentioned before? Creating packets, you can really challenge people like the bucket challenge. Challenge them to register five people before National Voter Registration Day on September the 25th. Challenging an individual who’s already in -- already registered to vote really engages them and involves them a little bit more in the process. We want you to consider the best location. Is this in a student center or outside the local grocery store? What is the best time to get the biggest bang for your buck? Before work when people are in a rush? That could be a great time to hand out individual voter registration forms. They’re perforated, folded for you to pop into the mail. In California, no postage is necessary. It’s great to hand to people who are on their way to work. Or is it better to engage people at lunchtime when they have a little bit more time to talk to you? You want to be clear with your volunteers, you’ll need two or three people at your table if you choose to do a tabling event. We want enough people at the table so we can have a one-on-one dialogue and have a meaningful conversation. We want to remind your volunteers not to sit behind the table but to stand out front and engage people.

Sometimes if we have too many volunteers, they get bored standing around. You should realize… Is it better to use hard paper voter registration forms? Or should I bring my computer and register people online like we can do here in California? If you bring your computer, be sure you have a strong internet signal and be aware that you may not be able to see the screen in sunny locations. Just remember… Should I decorate the table with brightly colored banners? Have your voter registration folders and have give always, or should I keep the table simple and clean and really eye catching? I’ve had voter registration events were I’ve had too much literature on the table. You really don’t need a lot of literature. Just one or two pieces to give a good idea of the voting process, what are the requirements and where they can find more information. Next slide, please?

On this slide I have a big blue swirl that reminds us to stay engaged. It says great expectation on the top. Again, be clear of your goals. Sometimes volunteers don't understand that it's not just about sitting behind the table or handing out literature. We want to make sure that our volunteers will excite the community about civic engagement, reminding them to read the paper, sign your sheet, pick up literature about you, or potentially donate money to help the cause. Be sure to have a handout about your group or organization. Next slide, please.

Be clear of your goal. Do you want to register five people or 50 people? If you want to register 50 people, that means you need to talk to at least 500. Sometimes you need to talk to 10 people in order to get one person to register to vote. Create partnerships with organizations like the League of Women Voters. At every location across the country, every local league has a voter registration team. To find out where your local League of Women Voters is, you can always go to LWV.org. There is a get involved tab for you to click on. It shows you where your local League of Women Voters is located. You can also do a Google search and find their telephone number directly.

As you go and think about registering voters, you have to realize, what do I have to offer the voter? You have to be confident that just being there and being out in the public shows the public that you care about community, civic engagement, voting and participating. So you offer a lot by being there at the table. Any information, the details, the minute details can be learned very easily. You can call your Elections Department, and you can Google whatever county you are in. I'm in Marin County, so I Google Marin County Elections Department and the telephone number and information about their website pops right up. You can also talk to the League of Women Voters again or other organizations like the YWCA. They have advocacy groups. They can help you. Create those partnerships and don't try to reinvent the wheel. There are strong voices that are already out there. Remember to choose wisely, and remember, you offer a lot by being there. Okay, next slide, please.

In California, we’ve really had a lot of great changes to the elections process. Here in California, we don't need a stamp to mail in our vote-by-mail ballot. Our vote-by-mail ballots can be postmarked on Election Day, November the 6th. But don't have to be into the Elections Department until three days afterwards. That's new legislation that allows the ballot -- the post office three more days to handle the mail. You also -- and the last day to register by paper ballot is October 22nd. In California, we have same-day voter registration. This is done at the Elections Department. You can go into your Elections Department in California on Elections Day, register to vote and vote at the same time. So it's really a great opportunity for us to take advantage of these new rules. At this time, we have the opportunity to vote by mail or vote at the traditional polling place. That's the location where you would go to cast your ballot. Voting by mail ballots in California are mailed 30 days before the election.

It gives you more time to review each ballot measure, review the candidates and spend a little bit more time. You can mail your ballot with no postage, as I mentioned before, or you can walk it into the polling place if you want the traditional voting experience. You also have the opportunity to vote at the polling place. That's where you would sign the roll book and use the traditional machines, or you could use, in my county they have sip puff machines. If you have dexterity issues. Next slide, please.

Let's talk a little bit more about tricks of the trade at your voter registration event. We talked about making your table eye-catching. We want everyone who is participating to smile and make eye contact with people. Stand in front of the table asking people, engaging them as they pass by with the question, “Are you registered to vote?” Or asking them, “Do you know where your polling place is?” They might answer, “I'm not yet registered.” You can say, “This is a great time for you to register to vote. It only takes two minutes. This is a great time for you to register to vote. It only takes two minutes.” Many people are already engaged in the voting process. Sometimes I like to make brownies and slice them into one inch cubes. If they are already registered to vote, I say, “Well, you get brownie points for already being registered to vote.” I hand them a brownie -- that is if they are not gluten free. There is another category of passersby that we often see.

Those people are noncitizens. We don't want to turn people off with the citizenship question. I often say when people start to shy away, I say, “It's okay if you can't register to vote today because it's important for you to participate because you are an influencer. Sometimes it's more important to be an influencer because you can talk to your friends and family and influence those around you to participate in the voting process.” Many people who are not citizens shy away and feel embarrassed. This is a way we can up left them and include them in the process. We also have new legislation in California where we can pre-register voters who are 16 and 17 years old. We use the same paper form, but there’s a new check box on the California voter registration form that says, “Are you 16 or 17 years old?” This is a great opportunity for the Secretary of State to put their name in the roll and send them literature throughout the year. In California, we have two months that are dedicated to the youth voter.

In April, many high schools have mock elections, and in September, the Secretary of State will send out an e-mail about voter registration day. We want to engage these youths, anyone in high school or 16 or 17 years old, the importance of voting. Get them on our team before the voting process begins. Next slide, please.

We also have to offer -- we also have to know what else is there to offer the voter. The League of Women Voters puts out something called The Easy Voter Guide. It's a shortcut researched information where they have done the work for you. They give you pros and cons of ballot measures and propositions. They don't give recommendations for candidates, only ballot measures and state propositions. This is a great resource for you. That's The Easy Voter Guide. The website called VotersEdge.org is a place to find information about candidates. It's not information that the League of Women Voters provides. It's a free spot for each candidate to upload their photograph, their top three priorities, contact information and if they want to take the time, they can even go deeper and talk about their philosophy and their work-flow plan being if they were elected in the job.

Many states have audio CD’s available with the ballot measures and propositions. …audio tapes for you to listen to. You can find those at this telephone number listed 800-345-VOTE, 800-345-8683. You can also go to the Secretary of State's website and download an audio MP-3 file of the propositions. Your Elections Department also offers large-print voter guides and large-print voter information for those who have difficulty seeing -- like me. You can also call your Elections Department and let them know that you’re coming to the polling place. Many Election Departments throughout the County of California have curb side voting, so you don't even have to get out of your car. Sometimes you can call the Elections Department, and they'll come to your home, they’ll come to senior citizen's retirement home, and help them vote on Election's Day. You have to do a little homework and call your Elections Department to ask what they offer.

Did you know that you can find your polling place if you go to MarinCountyElections.org? Or type in the ‘name of your county’elections.org, and you can find their telephone number and list of polling places. By putting in some simple information in what they call a V.I.P., Very Important Person's voter portal, you can put in your street address and find your polling place. Many locations offer transportation to polling places, time off of work, and other opportunities for you to engage the voter. This is -- this slide, this information here, this is what you have to offer the voter. Not only are you registering them to vote, you're educating them with the website VotersEdge, and you are also giving them the opportunity to get to the polling place. I would like to thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to talk to you today. I have other information to provide, and I will forward details and information to Ted. I'm wondering if you have questions, feel free to ask me when question time begins.

>> TED JACKSON: Thank you very much, Veda. We appreciate you sharing from your experience. For those of you around the country, we have worked with Veda for a long time. She does an amazing job in Marin County of registering voters both in her role as an outreach person, Marin County registrar voters and also with the League of Women Voters. Every time I'm in Marin County, no matter what kind of festival I'm at, I always run into Veda who is either working on a political issue or registering voters. Thank you very, very much.

So, I want to move us along and connect us to Kathleen Unger from VoteRiders. And I’m going to switch presentations here. So Kathleen, thank you so much for joining us today. I’ve unmuted your line.

>> KATHLEEN UNGER: Hi. So we ran into some technical difficulties. I sure hope you can all hear me through what we put together here. Thank you so much to you Ted and to Zach and your colleagues at the American Association of People with Disabilities for hosting this dialogue. And all you do to enhance and protect the right to vote of Americans with disabilities. We at VoteRiders’ look forward to learning all we can to better help you and your constituents. Next slide please.

So, VoteRiders is a 501(c)3 national non-profit organization that I founded in early 2012.

I knew from the 2010 elections, that it would be a tsunami of voter ID laws. And I knew the existing terrific organizations that handle litigation and advocacy but not direct assistance to voters. Our mission is to ensure all citizens are able to exercise their right to vote. With so with laser-type focus on voter ID. In essence, our mission is to ensure voters have an acceptable ID if required in their state and the confidence that they do. Or the confidence that they’re not required because their state, like California doesn't have a voter ID law. VoteRiders informs and helps citizens to secure their voter IDs and for organizations like AAPD and communities just need voter ID education and assistance efforts. We concentrate especially on helping voters obtain the documents required by states with voter ID law. Next slide, please.

So, 11% of voting age U.S. citizens lack a common government issued federal ID card. But over 25 million voters nationally cannot have the [ unintelligible ] type of ID that are common to all State voter ID laws. Voters, state driver license, state ID. Think about that. 25 million Americans without by far the most common type of voter ID. At this point, there are voter ID laws in 34 states. Ten of those states have strict voter ID laws meaning voter’s ballots will count only if they show a voter ID during early voting [ unintelligible ] state or at the polling place or within specified short period of time after Election Day. Next slide, please.

Now in addition to those 25 million without a likely voter ID, VoteRiders on the ground experience, which has been corroborated by reputable university studies in Texas and Wisconsin, shows that many, many millions more citizens are so confused and intimidated by complicated and stringent voter ID laws that they won't vote even though they have the requisite ID. Indeed, there’s massive confusion about what documents are needed to register in addition to what ID is needed to vote. Many people have the necessary ID but don't know it. Many others believe they need ID in their state but do not. Importantly, not only are voters confused, but poll workers in every state are confused. More fundamentally, many, if not most people do not understand that voter ID is different from and in addition to voter registration. They hear the words "voter ID," but they are thinking voter registration. I guarantee you all, if you dig deeply enough among the people you know, you’re going to find that very confusion. Bottom line, it's not enough to register to vote in many states with voter ID laws. We work with organizations and voters nationwide. We focus especially on voter ID states with highly competitive House, Senate and Gubernatorial races. What if you live in a state without a voter ID law? Again, like California. Why should you care? Because if there is an issue that you really care about, it really does matter that those who agree with you can vote regardless of where they live. Next slide, please.

Who is impacted by these voter ID laws? Which include again, many, many millions more who are just plain confused and won't vote. The photos on this slide show some of the voters whom VoteRiders has helped to get their voter ID. These laws disproportionately impact a broad proportion of the population who are more likely to be without a current driver’s license in their state. As you all well know, many voters with disabilities are unable to drive. In 2012, Doug Cruz of Rutgers University conducted a study based on the Pew Foundation survey of performance of American elections and found that voters with disabilities were over one and a half times more likely than the population as a whole to lack ID. Other groups of at risk voters include older adults who are no longer driving, if they ever did or if they have mobility issues. Young adults, including students who attend school in another state. Voters of color. Voters with low income who can't afford the time and money to obtain a voter ID. And women because over 80% of women change their names upon marriage and a number of states have laws where they’re supposed to be an exact match between the name on your ID and the name in which you’re registered to vote. Next slide, please.

This shows a map with different colors that indicate which states have strict verses non-strict voter ID laws. And those that do not have voter ID laws at all. Next slide, please.

VoteRiders, we at VoteRiders, we identify the at-risk voters through our voter ID coalition coordinators in Arizona, Florida and Wisconsin. Through our website, through our toll free help line. Tthrough texting, e-mail, social media, all kinds of events and hundreds of partner organizations. We are -- we have partner organizations in at least 17 states. Some of them, in turn, are coalitions of organizations. These organizations serve or otherwise interface with the kinds of voters, especially the kinds of voters whom I enumerated who are at-risk including of course, the community of those who have a disability. We are also, and from my perspective, most excitingly, we have -- we have entered into partnerships with organizations that engage in voter registration drives and issue adequacy who do that one-to-one canvassing or phone banking or text banking, sometimes tabling. Because these are the organizations that are out there having that one-to-one contact with the voter. And there are only two organizations efforts so far, who have added a voter ID question to their script, their outreach script when they are canvassing they or some banking... And that question from our perspective is always best if it's just very simply, “Do you have a current driver’s license in your state?” Because there is no confusing whether you do or you don't or if you don't know, that's fine.

By asking people if “Do you have a voter ID?”, the fact is, again, people don't know what is allowed or required for a voter ID or photo ID. That kind of question just can lead to further confusion. We are working with the 501(c)3 table in Wisconsin, Wisconsin Voices. They have a recently released voter app, and have added this voter ID question to it. Those who respond with either “no” or… basically anything, with anything other than a resounding yes, those voter files are made accessible to VoteRiders and we follow up to make sure that people are confident, that they have the right ID and to provide soup to nuts assistance to them if they need help to obtain their ID. We are also working with an effort based in Virginia that’s expanding up to 16 states – a virtual phone banking effort. And again, it's the same kind of operation. We are very interested in entering into what we call these “direct voter contact partnerships” so that we can help with the voter ID while all these other organizations are out there, basically in a position to identify who needs help. Next slide, please.

This shows both the English and Spanish language versions of our Texas voter ID information card. Both groups, types of partnerships that I just mentioned, the coalition – the voter ID coalitions and direct voter contact partnerships, they and -- well, frankly thousands of others, are distributing VoteRiders freely downloadable cards that we have created. They’re literally the size of a business card for all 50 states and DC. Both in English and in Spanish, and they are unique. They are -- because they are clear and they are precisely accurate, and they are especially helpful when someone is in the polling place and dealing with a misinformed poll worker to give them both something substantively… “Here’s the highlights of what is required. I have this.” Or it gives them confidence. They also actually have an impact on turnout. One of our hundreds of partners, Mi Familia Vota – Texas, for the November 2016 election handed out our cards. Again, both in English and in Spanish to the -- while they were canvassing the six precincts, the majority Latino precincts in Houston, Harris County. After the November 2016 election, Harris County Clerk reported that turnout county wide had decreased 1% from the prior presidential election in 2012. However in those six precincts where our card had been distributed, turnout increased cumulatively 92%, almost 9% per precinct.

This kind of a confidence builder, as you can see, makes a big, big difference. We provide these cards for free to 501(c)3 organizations. When you go to our website in the tool bar it says "get involved." You can click on a form where you can order the cards and we have them printed and shipped off, which we have done for over a million of cards so far. Next slide, please.

This slide shows a photo of a then-homeless veteran with whom we worked intensively for six months to obtain a DMV approved birth certificate so that Mr. Hatton could in turn obtain his voter photo ID and vote. Which he was finally able to do. VoteRiders will cover the cost of the underlying documents in order to get the "free voter ID". Talking about the certified copy of the birth certificate, of any name-change document. Again, the marriage certificate, all of the various ways that people's names have changed over time. Social security card, trying to get that. And we arrange for transportation to government ID issuing offices. We'll have somebody accompany someone to those offices if they like. We work with an army of pro bono lawyers all over the country.

That's the kind of assistance that we give. Next slide, please.

What can you do? You could volunteer. Again, on our website in the tool bar, “Get Involved”. If you click on that, you will find a volunteer questionnaire. Also, we’d love for you to sign up at our website. Scrolling down to the bottom of the homepage is just an area -- a little area where you can sign up. As you can see, voter ID has a sizeable impact on the right to vote and on elections all together. Please know how much we anticipate learning what voter ID related issues you might bring to our attention and how VoteRiders might be more effectively of assistance to the disability community. Next slide, please.

We welcome your questions and ideas at VoteRiders.org or [info@voteriders.org](mailto:info@voteriders.org) or by calling or texting our toll-free helpline: 844-338-8743. Thank you very much.

>> TED JACKSON: Thank you very much, Kathleen. Now we’re gonna move along to Paul Spencer from Disability Rights California.

>>PAUL SPENCER: So, thanks for having me. I name is Paul Spencer. I’m a staff attorney with Disability Rights California. We’re the Protection & Advocacy system for California. I think a lot of you are familiar with our work. I'm part of the voting rights practice group. We work to make sure that voting is accessible for people with disabilities in California. Next slide, please.

What my first slide is “What does junk mail have to do with overcoming voter registration?” This is just something that I always like to ask people about. Do you get junk mail leading up to campaigns? I know that people find it annoying. I do too. If you get that junk mail, it’s a good sign. It means you are a register voter. You’re part of the political process. Candidates want your vote. You’re getting that junk mail, you’re getting phone calls. You’re getting people knocking on your door. I think that’s a good thing. One problem though, is if you’ve never been registered to vote, is you’re out of the cycle. Politicians don't know you exist and they don't want your vote. So, in some ways, if you are not a registered voter, it's harder to get into the cycle of civic engagement. I always like to joke, you really shouldn't think about that mail that’s just going to start piling up here probably within two weeks and just kind of dump on us all through the first week of November. It's a good sign, it’s part of civic engagement. Let’s move on to the next slide.

Maybe some good news is as far as people that self-report with disabilities versus the population without disabilities, the voter registration statistics are somewhat comparable. This is from an article from the Pew Research Center. It’s a political profile of disabled Americans. It's a great article and really kind of gets into some of the details. It gets into the nitty gritty of who’s registered and who's not. It kind of lets you brainstorm your strategy. I think it's interesting that we’re not -- this isn't doom and gloom here. The voter registrations are somewhat comparable. This is kind of what we’re starting with somewhat good news.

If you go to the next slide, the kind of bad news is that registered voters with disabilities are less likely to vote than people without disabilities. Also, if you look at this too, right now where we are, a lot of studies show about one in five Americans have disabilities. Even if it is about 80%, it's a lot of people with disabilities that not registered to vote. When you just think about how to overcome barriers to get people to increase the voter registration. Let's go to the next slide.

“Trying to get to overcoming barriers.” You know, one issue there is that registered voters with disabilities are more likely to report that it was too difficult to vote. I’m sure a lot of you might see in your work. You experience those barriers talking to people, especially, you know, just trying to get a ride on Election Day. Things are difficult. Kind of those same lessons also apply to people with disabilities that aren't registered to vote. A lot of it are perceived roadblocks. Or reasons why they think they shouldn’t be registered to vote because they can’t vote for X reason. One thing my colleagues and I do in our work, we try to empower people with ways to navigate past these perceived roadblocks. And I think also, empower people with this knowledge is good to get registered voters with disabilities also out to the polls. Let's go to the next slide.

It's get past the roadblocks. I underlined 3 things here. It’s Teach, Explain and Empower. When you are approaching voter registration, you need to talk about, need to address people's concerns. One thing that’s really helpful is to start with the basics. There are really good Federal and State laws that guarantee the ability for people with disabilities to vote privately and independently. One way that is, is that polling places have to be accessible. That's a big one. I think you all can be surprised when people are really unsure whether or not their polling location is going to be accessible. Yes, there is a little bit of wiggle room and occasionally – sometimes. I shouldn’t say occasionally. Not all polling locations are accessible. Generally they are. California is kind of doing okay. Other states have more problems with physical polling place accessibility. That's one issue. It can be helpful to help voters, especially whether or not they are going to know that their polling place is accessible. There are ways to look that up to find out. That can be a way to empower people. Every polling location has an accessible voting system. Every polling location in the country is required to have an accessible voting system. We often run into voters that are unsure if there’s going to be one there or not. I think that knowledge is really helpful, in just kind of going over what these accessibility requirements are that guarantee the right to vote highly independently. Can get people more engaged and maybe more willing to register to vote.

The next step is, great, you are registered to vote, but -- I often hear this barrier from people is that, “I'm not going to register to vote or bother because I really just can't get the materials in a way that I can access them. You need to explain how to get accessible materials. On one hand, there’s how do you get materials that are accessible? On the other hand, it's how to get materials that are easy to understand and navigate. I love the League of Women’s Voter material they put out. They put out the Easy Voter Guide. That's my favorite. I'm also not just focused on getting materials in accessible format, but also getting materials in a way that you can realistically get through… Sometimes in California we have a massive number of ballot propositions. So, finding ways to effectively navigate that information. Also, reminding people what, you know, the sort of basic election rules. Yes, you can bring written materials into the polling location with you. You can bring a cheat sheet. I bring a cheat sheet. Sometimes, this is more basic stuff that you might forget about that sort of gets lost in the conversation. I think that it's always useful to remind people what the rules are. There are rules that you can bring someone into the polling booth to help you fill out the ballot if you want them to. Ideally, you would using an accessible voting system. But these options are there, and you are depending on the voter that can be really helpful. The last one here is, I think the hardest. That's getting over the voter apathy about voting, like “My vote's not going to matter”. I think that's the tough one to get past. I think that just really helps to talk it through.

I always like to tell stories about, if you are a person of disability often times you have the decisions of your local politicians really matter and your state politicians. Those local races are where your vote is more likely to really have an impact. To kind of talk it through that stuff, I think, really helps. Again, it’s teaching about what the rules are, explaining how to get accessible materials and then how to get past that voter apathy to empower people to vote. So, let’s go to the next slide.

We just talked about roadblocks. Now I want to talk about opportunities for registration. Increasing these opportunities. The other panelists touched on some other ways you register to vote, like, you would, let’s go really old school… You would fill out a voter registration card at the library. Or you can register to vote online in most states. But there are some other tools we have in our tool chest as disability rights advocates. Let's talk about the National Voter Registration Act. This federal law requires public assistance offices and state funded offices that primarily serve people with disabilities to offer voter registration opportunities. What that means is, you know, let’s say that you are a client at a regional center. When you apply or when you renew, you are going to be offered the opportunity to register to vote. This is a wonderful protection for people with disabilities. Part of the reason Congress did it is because the idea that people with disabilities are less likely to go to the DMV. Just offering the voter registration opportunity at the DMV isn’t enough.

These options under, for public assistance and state funded offices that primarily serve people with disabilities which I know is a mouthful. But, you know, a lot of you on the call work for an organization that is required to offer voter registration opportunities. I think it's always useful in your own organization to make sure that, you know, you’re NVRA Coordinator that you’re supposed to have is following the rules. When I'm talking to people from other organizations or other agencies, I always try to bring it up to see if it's something that is on the mind of the front line employees. That people are aware of what the rules are and kind of make sure the process is working. It should also be coordinate in California, anyway. The County Election Officials are helping to coordinate those voter registration cards and count ballots. In California we’re having some luck getting some additional agencies as well. This is an important protection for people with disabilities. But really, it matters if we, as advocates are staying on top of it and making sure that the compliance is actually happening. The next one, though, this is part of the NVRA. But traditionally what most people think of, when they think of the NVRA as voter registration opportunities at the DMV. What's different though is, seven states so far are now doing automatic DMV voter registration. I put automatic in quotation marks. It’s not exactly automatic. It depends state to state.

Oregon is relatively automatic, but you’re automatically registered to vote. Where as in California, you’re defaulted into registering to vote if you’re otherwise eligible. You have to affirmatively opt out. For example, the box comes checked, “I want to register to vote”. You have to actually go to make the affirmative effort to say, “I don't want to register to vote”. This is better because human nature, we are less likely to opt out. This is a good practice for getting people registered. There are seven states that have done it. For example, in California rolled our new system out in April. They have released numbers for April and May. The increase in registration is tenfold than what they would normally get in a month. So it went from about 25,000 to 250,000. They are still working out the data. But this trend over the years is really going to increase the amount of people registered to vote. It’s definitely going to capture people with disabilities and also increase the general voter registration rates. It's also useful especially here in California. We worked really hard to get the DMV to put in an accessible computer in all the DMV field offices. If you are in another state and are curious about doing this as well, talk to me afterwards. We think this is a big win. In every field office, there’s an accessible computer now which has AT features that should allow you to fill out the forms privately and independently. But also, importantly when filling out that voter registration question, you can do that privately and independently. In the past, if you were filling out paper forms at the DMV, you would have had to disclose your political party. It’s kind of bringing that private and independent concept not just to voting itself, but also registering to vote and more of the process.

Regardless, it's nice at the DMV to have this accessible option which they didn't have in the past. If you are curious about that or you work in another state and you want to talk to me afterwards, please contact me. I love chatting about it. The take away here is, I think we’re going to see an increase in voter registration numbers in general in these seven states, especially in California where one in five Americans live. It’s going to increase the overall voter registration rates, which as I was talking about in the beginning, is a good thing because it gets people involved in the system. It gets you getting that junk mail, calls and it gets you into the system. It's great. Let's move on to the last slide I have which is the most complicated.

This is definitely a barrier to voter registration. In California, we call it conservatorship of the person. In other states, it's guardianship over an adult. It’s basically… the court will designate someone to oversee the personal and medical affairs of another person. In California, we call the person that’s in charge of the personal financial decisions is the conservator. The person that needs that help is the conservatee. Here’s the important things about this. It's the judge's determination about whether or not that person is mentally incompetent. That's an unfortunate term. It’s a term that varies state to state. Generally, if you are mentally incompetent, you’re not capable to vote. Let’s talk about some good stuff there. It's the judge making the determination, it’s not the conservator. That's important to remember. Especially if you look at somebody’s probate paperwork, and that box isn’t checked that the person is mentally incompetent, that means that they can vote. It's really not the conservator's decision, it’s the person themselves that is conserved that gets the decision about whether or not they want to vote.

Let's talk about the standard a little bit. This varies state to state. If you are curious, there’s also the Pew Research Center has another really good article out comparing the state to state about what the conservatorship/guardianship process looks like in each state. In California, Maryland, Nevada and New Mexico, we have a standard that the AVA thinks is pretty good. Basically that is before a court is going to remove the right to vote, they have to find beyond a clear and convincing evidence that a person cannot communicate with or without reasonable accommodations their desire to participate in the voting process. This basically means that if you are able to communicate and you want to vote, you are not going to lose the right to vote. Which is a pretty voter friendly standard. We like that and that’s why it’s a best practice. This is new in California. It's only been in effect for about two years. Especially, if you are an advocate in California, if someone was conserved a long time ago, they might have been conserved under a different standard and they might want to get the right to vote back. One way you can get that right to vote back, in California, it's pretty easy. You show the court you have the desire to vote, you’ve met that standard. Disability Rights California, for Californians with disabilities that are conserved, we’ve made a tool kit that has a sample letter. Depending on the state you are in, your Protection and Advocacy system might have something similar. In California it’s relatively simple. You don't technically even need a lawyer to get the right to vote back. You just need to show the judge you have the desire to vote.

Think about it, if you write a letter to your judge that you want to vote… You’ve more or less met the standard in California that you have communicated the desire to vote. That's how you would get it reinstated. It's something in your advocacy work, this is a potential barrier. We hear it a lot too. Especially from parents that are a conservator about whether or not their adult child can vote. Really, it is the court's decision about whether or not that person has the ability to vote and should keep the right to vote. It's an easy way to go back to is that it’s the judge's determination. Also, just be available to kind of help people talk through how to get the right to vote back. Those are all of the slides I have. It's time to turn it back over to questions now. I appreciate you all tuning in.

>> TED JACKSON: All right, thank you very much, Paul. We are going to open the floor to questions

>> ZACH BALDWIN: Ted, this is Zach. I see a question popped up from Nancy Wilson just asking for Paul's contact information.

>>PAUL SPENCER: I'm happy to -- I can e-mail her afterwards, but it's Paul.Spencer@disabilityRightsCA.org.

>> VEDA FLOREZ: I would like to share a good e-mail address for me. That would be MarinElections360@gmail.com.

>> KATHLEEN UNGER: Again for Kathleen Unger at VoteRiders, the best would be [info@voteriders.org](mailto:info@voteriders.org).

>> TED JACKSON: Great. Thank you, Kathleen. I want to thank you for joining us. Thank you for bearing with our technical issues today. This is our first webinar on the zoom platform.