



Independence Center Incorporated

Stephen L. Johnson, Executive Director

October 6, 2004

Dear Registrars,

On September 14, 2004 the City of Virginia Beach office of voter registration hosted a demonstration by five voting machine vendors. Ms. Hager had invited Independence Center staff to this demonstration and asked that we provide input regarding the performance for individuals with disabilities. ECI had staff present representing both physical and sensory disabilities. The following is the staff opinion of the two voting machines they felt were most responsive to individuals with disabilities for independent voting.

A. The consensus of our evaluation ranked the Diebold Electronics System as our top choice. It is clearly the most accessible and accommodating voting unit on several levels for both persons with mobility limitations (physically disabled) as well as for those with visual limitations and those who are blind. Our assessment:

1. Excellent human speaking voice, good quality and easy to recognize words and pronunciation of candidate names
2. Audio voting directions (in the audio voting mode for the non-sighted voter or the voter with literacy barriers) are consistently given throughout the process and are very clear and easy to understand and follow. This is a key difference between Diebold and other voting systems in that directions are given at every step. Some other systems give all directions at the beginning and require that you remember them as you proceed, or have help functions that do not adequately guide the voter. The Diebold system also reads votes back to the voter after they are selected so that you immediately know what key you have pushed and who you voted for.
3. The adapted hand held box for use with the audio voting feature is designed to replicate a phone keypad. This accommodates anyone as everyone uses a telephone keypad and is familiar with placement of the buttons and numbers while not every visually impaired person knows how to read Braille, for example. Persons with sight but low reading ability or those who are illiterate also are familiar with a phone keypad. This format makes it easy to follow audio directions to place a vote by pressing a certain number on the keypad.
4. The handheld keypad device is on a long cord and can be held by an attendant while standing behind the voter booth. This means that a person with dexterity limitations who cannot push the buttons themselves

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can bring a friend or assistant with them to push the buttons. Because the assistant can stand behind the voter booth, and especially if the voter puts on the audio headset, their votes can be confidential. They can merely tell their assistant "push 5" or "Push 6" and the assistant will have no way of knowing who they are voting for.

5. The large print version is very good and easy to read. There is also a feature that allows the user to adjust the contrast.
6. Persons with physical disabilities which result in limited reach range or limited mobility or those of short stature can easily use the Diebold system because the function keys (next, previous, vote) are at the bottom of the screen rather than at the top. Other machines have the function buttons at the top of the screen which are very difficult if not impossible for a sighted person with limited range / mobility to reach.

B. Second choice: Unilect Corporation

The Unilect system is similar to Diebold in that audio commands are given throughout the process at each step and ensure that a blind or illiterate voter clearly understands the process and who they are casting votes for. One negative with Unilect is that the voice is not as clear and is unpleasant to listen to. Also, the audio voting process is very slow and tedious. While voters come away feeling confident that they know who they voted for, the process is very time consuming and frustrating due to the slow pace. Another negative is that while the orange and white control buttons are very easy to see for a visually impaired user who has some sight, the overall look is reminiscent of a rehabilitation device while the adapted handset on the Diebold does not call any attention to itself as being much different from what the non-disabled voter would use to vote. Lastly on the Unilect system the function keys (next, previous, vote) are at the top of the screen where they are difficult or impossible to reach for persons with mobility limitations that affect reach range. It is the consensus of our evaluative team that while the Unilect would enable a blind or illiterate voter to accurately cast their vote, it would be an unnecessarily tedious process and that there would be barriers for the person with short stature or reach range issues.

We appreciate the opportunity to participate in this process. If you have any questions or would like any other type of involvement for the electoral process, please contact me.

Sincerely,



Richard DiPeppe

Director for Advocacy and Services

cc: S. Johnson, ECI
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