

**Access Ready Successfully Challenging the
State Board of Elections
Dateline February 2022 Annapolis Maryland**

Access Ready has no confidence in the direction or choices being made by the Maryland State Board of Elections (SBE) where a new pollbook system is concerned.

After a year of talking, we have found they have no real interest in accessibility.

They say they do, but their actions indicate otherwise.

Access Ready, and its community partners the IMAGE Center for People with Disabilities of Maryland, the National Association of the Deaf, and the National Federation of the Blind, seek to ensure that Marylanders with disabilities are able to exercise their right to vote with the same independence and privacy afforded to people without disabilities.

Access Ready presented our concerns to the state's Board of Public Works (BPW), asking them to reject the SBE's proposed \$24 million contract with DemTech for an electronic pollbook system.

The Access Ready community partners are extremely concerned that the vendor selected by the SBE will not provide pollbooks that are accessible to people with disabilities. Marylanders with disabilities have faced this situation over and over again - state agencies like the SBE purchase expensive technology that does not prioritize accessibility and decline to adopt available technology that is already accessible. Again and again, agencies

like the SBE accept vague vendor promises to add accessibility eventually - promises that never materialize.

The SBE's chosen vendor - DemTech -- has no history of accessible technology. DemTech's website does not even suggest that its electronic pollbooks are accessible. Access Ready's request for a demonstration of DemTech's accessibility went unanswered.

Only when the Board of Public Works demanded they meet with us did the meeting take place.

Unfortunately, the meeting did not allay our fears. The representatives of Demtech could not answer any of our questions about plans to make their product accessible. The SBE may not have learned from past experience that purchasing technology based on vague promises of future accessibility is unwise, expensive, and illegal. But Access Ready and its community partners have learned those lessons.

We know that a technology vendor that cannot assert its accessibility, that has no history of accessibility, and that will not willingly engage with the disability community, is unlikely to produce an accessible product - no matter how eloquently it promises to do so. We have seen it too often - lofty promises give way to time pressure and other priorities. In the end, the promises turn into excuses. People with disabilities are left without options. And the technology is out of date and replaced before it is ever made accessible.

To avoid exactly this outcome, Access Ready raised their concerns with the Board in March. But here we are again - relying

on hope and promises. For \$24 million, Marylanders with disabilities deserve much more than hope and promises. If the SBE chooses to go ahead with the inaccessible pollbooks, it is likely to violate Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and other federal civil rights laws - Again.

Access Ready and its community partners will have to enforce those civil rights laws - Again.

The SBE will have to purchase a new accessible pollbook system or pay an expert to make the DemTech system accessible - needlessly increasing the cost to Maryland taxpayers - Again.

"The BPW has an opportunity to avoid this endless vicious cycle and to stand up for the civil rights of Marylanders with disabilities. If the Maryland Board of Public Works is unable to verify the accessibility of the electronic pollbook system, we request that the Maryland Board of Public Works reject the proposed SBE contract with DemTech.

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