

RI DISABILITY VOTE PROJECT

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Participate, Vote, Succeed

Disability Vote Action: The Email Newsletter of the RI Disability Vote Project

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Dear Friend,

Happy New Year! This is the fifth email newsletter of the Rhode Island Disability Vote Project. This newsletter contains updates about the Project, notices about local disability events, and action alerts either sponsored by the Rhode Island Disability Vote Project or referred to us by other disability organizations. If you would not like to receive this email newsletter, or if you know of someone else who would like to be added to the list, please email Lee Strauss. Her email address is **ampersand1@cox.net**. Please email Project Organizer James deBoer if you have items that you would like to submit for future newsletters.

Well, the elections are over and we are very proud to report that all **our hard work has paid off!** The Automark machines were used in a little less than half of all the polling places in Rhode Island. And, we know from conversations in Rhode Island and with our allies in other states that this election, **a record number of people with disabilities came out to vote!** We are still awaiting the final numbers from our member organizations, and we should have the full report in the near future, but we're moving in the right direction!

Unfortunately, not everyone who went to vote had a positive experience. Many of us who used the Automark either faced a long delay or could not vote successfully with it and had to vote the conventional way. This is unacceptable. We are outraged that there were so many problems for voters with disabilities, and we are firmly committed to improving things for the next round of elections. The Rhode Island Disability Law Center has informed us that **the deadline to file a complaint** because of problems during Election Day (Automark-related or otherwise) will be **Monday, February 5th**. Please submit complaints or questions to Kate Bowden, at 831-3150, kbowden@ridlc.org, mailing address 349 Eddy St., Providence, RI 02903.

Tuesday, January 2nd, all of the state's newly elected and re-elected general officers were sworn in and a group of us from the RIDVP went to see it. **Fifty of us attended altogether**, wearing buttons that said "I care about disability issues in Rhode Island." **We were by far the largest single group there.** Then, most of us stuck around to shake the hands of our state's leaders. Dianne and Deb from Advocates in Action took some great pictures, available online at http://advocatesinaction.org/photos/2007_gov/.

One interesting thing happened to remind us how much work we still have ahead of us. Right after we passed through the metal detector, a guard came over and interrogated a few of us about why so many people with disabilities were there, what

we were doing, and how we had found out about the event. Then the guard instructed us that everyone needed to wash our hands before shaking the hands of our elected officials. He rationalized that there were a lot of viruses going around and that all guests (not just people from the Project) were requested to stop at the handwashing station. Nonetheless, it was very obvious and insulting that he specifically told *us* to do this because he was stereotyping about people with disabilities.

The way to change all of this is to elect more people with disabilities to office—then the statehouse police can't be prejudiced against us! **Increasing civic and electoral participation among this state's disability community is the central focus of our Project**, and we are proud to announce that our first annual convention will take place on **Wednesday, April 4th, at the Warwick Public Library**. Details to follow. The Convention will feature electing our new Steering Committee and strategizing for the next couple of years, so participants will need to come with their sleeves rolled up!

That's it for the moment. Please let us know what's going on for you and your organization, and we'll see you soon! (To volunteer or make a financial contribution, please contact James deBoer, Project Organizer.)

NOTE: This newsletter is also included as an attachment to the email.