

For Immediate Release!

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Voting Workshop for People with Disabilities & Special Needs!

On Monday, September 22nd at 4:30 PM in Fort Worth, Texas, anyone who has a disability or special need can attend a workshop to learn and experience what it may be like when they go to the polls on November 4th. According to the Coalition for Texans with Disabilities, less than 34% of voting aged people with disabilities voted in the last presidential election compared to 51% of the able bodied population. Workshops are being held throughout the State of Texas to remedy this situation in the 2008 elections.

Workshop organizer Tracey Michol says one of the differences in this workshop is motivation. Michol served as a state party delegate in the primaries. "It was a great educational and empowering experience," signed Michol. "Everyone should experience our democracy in action. It will strengthen your resolve to participate."

Michol is deaf and has voted in previous elections, but this one was different. She was asked to be a delegate. As she progressed through the selection process, it was clear how little prepared our system was for someone like her. Luckily, there were people who knew American Sign Language and some who were interpreters. Most important, there were people who were willing to work with her. It was OJT (on the job training) for everyone. Her experience led Michol to organize a voting workshop.

"When Tracey told us about her idea, we jumped at the opportunity," said Dennis Borel, Executive Director of Coalition for Texans with Disabilities based in Austin. "We are working with Advocacy Inc. conducting workshops for people with disabilities around the state. We are impressed with the interest, the concern and the expected attendance. We are hoping this translates into votes in November."

Elected officials and candidates from both sides of the aisle – Democrats and Republicans – plan to attend. "It is important for people to feel that they have access to people who represent them," signed Michol. "It's a comforting feeling when a candidate takes the time to talk with you about issues that concern you and about how best he or she can help." There has been good response from those invited.

Nonprofit organizations which support the disabilities community have also been invited. An exhibit area will be set up for them to speak to attendees about their programs and services.

The voting training will be conducted by the Coalition for Texans with Disabilities including information on rights and voting options, a mock election, and practice on an accessible voting machine used in Tarrant County. Accessible voting technology permits people with blindness, low vision, deafness, mobility impairments and even quadriplegia to cast a private ballot. American Sign Language interpreters will be provided, and the facility is wheelchair accessible. Members of the disabilities community are encouraged to attend as well as their supporters, campaign and polling place workers, and those who are interested in issues facing the disabilities community.

The workshop will be held on September 22nd beginning at 4:30 PM at Arborlawn United Methodist Church, located at 5001 Briarhaven Road in Fort Worth, Texas. It is free. Refreshments are provided by local businesses including Golden Corral on Hulen in Fort Worth. Attendees will have an opportunity to register to vote. Be sure to bring your Texas or personal ID to confirm your name, address and date of birth. Visit <http://yourvotecounts.wordpress.com> for more information.