

**CITY OF PITTSBURGH/ALLEGHENY COUNTY  
TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES  
SEPTEMBER 19, 2005  
MINUTES**

**Location:** Heinz Room  
United Way Building, 1 Smithfield Street  
Pittsburgh, PA

**Members Present:** John Tague, Chairperson, Paul O’Hanlon, Co-chair, Eugene Barton, Ruth Walter Brenyo, Aurelia Carter, Liz Healey, Milton Henderson, Rich McGann, Viswa P. Mohanty, Jeff Parker, Penny Perlman, Katherine D. Seelman

**Members Absent:** Linda Dickerson

**Others Present:** Shirley J. Abriola, Laurie Anderson, Jennifer Behun, Adolphine Birescik, Karen Bluman, Bradley R. Burger, County Council Member Joan Cleary, Jim Cogyello, Al Condelucci, Barbara Ann Conrad, Brenda Dare, Linda Davis, Holly Dick, Joyce Driben, Jay Dusorin, Joe Elliott, Janet Evans, State Representative Dan Frankel, Rachael Freund, Martin Ingraharn, Chuck Keenan, Rob A. Kohlmeyer, Art Marizzaldi, Dawn Miller, Richard Meritzer, Anne Nalepa, Bill Newland, Randi Rubin, Joan Stein, Evelyn Stypula, Jason Tigano (Representing Congressman Michael Doyle), Carolyn Vidt

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Tague at 1:10 PM.

**Task Force Business Meeting:**

Mr. Tague recognized the attendance of County Council Member Joan Cleary and Jason Tigano representing Congressman Michael Doyle.

Mr. Tague said that at the hearing we held we heard about:

- Issues involving service to the Hearing challenged community.
- Housing – The Task Force recommended Paul Dick to the Planning Commission. He was selected. The Visitability ordinance was approved by the City but has been stalled in Harrisburg.
- Employment – Mr. Tague and Mr. Parker worked with the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County Human Resources Departments to make hiring easier. The Task Force made itself available as a resource.
- Intergovernmental Activities – The Task Force supported County Council Bill 18005, the Report Card legislation. This legislation is currently in limbo. David Rosenblatt has met with County Executive Dan Onorato. The Task Force took an active role in the proposed Medicaid cuts. We have been involved in voting rights on both the national and state level. Friday September 23<sup>rd</sup> Secretary Richmond is coming to Pittsburgh on a listening tour to ask the Disability Community how they can save money.

- Emergency Preparedness – We were involved in the drill May 7, 2005. We need to be at the table at all such events. The Community should be helping us.
- 911 calls - This month we will meet with Children's Hospital to look at remote hearing equipment for the deaf.

We still must work on a predictable funding source for the Task Force.

Mr. Parker introduced the members of the Task Force. He then made a presentation to Lisa Moses of a pen and pencil set for her work with the Task Force. Richard Meritzer accented the pen and pencil set for Ms. Moses and related her appreciation. Mr. Parker then introduced the main speaker for the Annual Meeting, Jim Dickson, Vice-President of the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD).

### **Voting Accessibility – A National Perspective**

Jim Dickson started by pointing out he had done voter registration in the black community of Pittsburgh. He talked about the work AAPD was doing. He said we had made progress in:

1. Access to polling places;
2. Voter registration;
3. Getting people to the polls.

Last Presidential election 14% of the disability community was able to vote. In 2004 35% of the polling places were wheel chair accessible. North Carolina, Rhode Island and North Dakota were 100% accessible. There was no deadline or definition for accessible voting. Last February the Department of Justice set a January 2006 deadline to have all polling places accessible with an accessible machine in each polling place. They also published definitions. AAPD organized meetings with the machine manufacturers. They are having people with disabilities comment on the machines.

Mr. McGann pointed out that they need interpreters in polling places. In some states the blind can bring their own readers. Mr. Dickson responded machine that talk need to be compatible with Hearing Aids. He recommends that in the future voting machines have a video of someone signing the ballot.

Someone else pointed out that polling places may be accessible, but machines are not. Mr. Dickson responded that there are four accessible voting machines. Three can be placed on your lap. Two use both key pads and touch screens. One machine has a sip and puff as well as paddle switches. The polling places must have their machines by January 2006.

He went on to say access is the right of every citizen with a disability, voting is their responsibility. We must change our culture. Registration and voter turnout must be part of the mission of every organization. As long as the disability community begs we will not have full rights and services. In Missouri the community organized a coalition and hired staff. They increased voter turnout by 11%. The only way to reach people is through organizations that provide services. Over the past 6 years voting by the disability community has increased, but it is still below the national average. Primaries are just as important. That is where candidates try out and select their message. The work must be here because all politics is local.

**Voting Accessibly – the Allegheny County Perspective:**

Paul O’Hanlon, a lawyer with the Disability Law Project, reported that of the 1314 polling places in Allegheny County, 248 (19%) are still inaccessible. In 1984 Congress passed an act requiring that all polling places be accessible. At that time 80% of polling places were not accessible. To keep an inaccessible polling place the state must certify that there are no accessible polling places available. This problem existed before Dan Onorato was elected County Executive. The Disability Law Project has been wrestling with this problem for 20 years without any support from the County or the State. The Disability Community should be involved in selecting machines. The County has until next election cycle to purchase machines. They want a procedure in place to capture the voters of inaccessible polling places. The state requires one accessible polling site in each county. We want an accessible location in each County Council District. Election Board workers in every inaccessible site have the paperwork necessary to allow everybody to vote.

Mr. McGann said he heard that voting by mail may be starting. He asked if Mail-in ballots are actually being considered. Mr. Dixon said yes. Mr. O’Hanlon added that you can vote by absentee ballot but it requires a lot of preparation. Alternative ballots work differently. People with disabilities should not be required to vote by mail.

Brenda Dare pointed out that the number of inaccessible polling places has not changed in four years. The lifts at the County Office Building, the mandated accessible polling place, do not accommodate heavier equipment. Mr. Dixon responded that Philadelphia was sued 2000 and lost. The law is on our side. We should sue the County. Al Condelucci added that this was either a case of insensitivity or lack of momentum. We can sue, we can persuade (which is what the Task Force is doing) or we can run candidates who champion disability issues. We should think seriously about electing candidates for strategic positions.

**Allegheny County Voting Accessibility Plan:**

Mr. Tague introduced Tim Johnson, Director of Administrative Services for Allegheny County, representing County Executive Onorato. He also recognized County Council Member John DeFazio, who is the Chairperson of the County Election Board. Mr. Johnson oversees the Public Safety, Public Health and Human Services functions of County Government. He said in compliance with HAVA they will be converting all voting machines in the County to digital machines by January 2006. The County has over 3000 machines and this will cost us \$18 million. In the 18 months he has been in this position he has given attention to accessible polling places. The County has one person to deal with all polling places. They have put together an aggressive plan. Mr. O’Hanlon is involved in this process.

1. They are doing a detailed analysis of each polling place including looking at stairs, parking handles, etc. They will make the easy corrections quickly.
2. They will divide the remaining polling places by Council District and work with the County Council members to identify alternative space.
3. They will examine all public and commercial buildings that are accessible to see if they can be used as polling places.

He said he would report back on what he has done for Mr. O’Hanlon’s input.

Mr. Barton pointed out that all polling places are inaccessible to blind voters. All polling places should have devices for the blind. Mr. Johnson said the law does not speak to that issue. They will try to come up with some solution. Mr. Barton responded that the law is clear on this issue. Mr. O'Hanlon added that the County is about to purchase voting machines. We are looking to the County to engage the public. Mr. Johnson assured us that the Election Board would engage the public.

Mr. DeFazio said they will look at all our issues. He wants to develop a system that will help everybody. They are just starting the process now. Someone asked if they had considered using new buildings. Mr. DeFazio said that has been considered. Mr. Johnson added that they were looking at alternative sites.

Joyce Driben said there should be at least two meetings for the Disability Community to test voting machines. Joan Cleary asked if someone from the Disability Community can contact County Council members. Mr. McGann asked if it is possible to have internet voting. Mr. O'Hanlon responded it was not.

Mr. Henderson asked if there is a place to start fixing polling places now. Mr. Johnson said there would be progress by the next election and major progress by the next primary. They will attack minor issues immediately. Mr. Henderson suggested some of the Task Force members and election staff go out together to look at these polling places. Mr. Johnson promised that within 30 days we would have another face to face meeting and he encouraged us to invite other people to that meeting. Janet Evans added she lives in Glen Hazel. She can get into her polling place but the voting machine is too high for her to reach.

Dr. Seelman asked how the members of the Election Board are chosen. Mr. DeFazio explained that the Board consists of the two At-large County Council members and the County Executive. Someone asked if anyone with a disability is on the Election Board. Mr. Johnson said no. The State will give the county a list of acceptable suppliers and then they will test and evaluate the machines. Mr. Dixon retorted the Pennsylvania's voting machine certification is slow and cumbersome. Mr. Johnson responded that they must abide by state law. Mr. Dixon went on to say that only eight states have not certified multiple vendors and Pennsylvania is one of them. When Philadelphia was sued on accessibility issues, the state was sued as well. Mr. O'Hanlon pointed out that when the Federal Government required accessible busses, there were no accessible busses in Allegheny County. They worked with Port Authority. He wants to do the same thing on this.

Ms. Healy pointed out that when the process is not transparent, there can be deals made. They still have not set up a process which includes intended users. We must exert pressure on the state to get the County that list. And then there should be a transparent process to evaluate the machines. Mr. Dixon added that the testing is being done on the state level. Mr. DeFazio said he does not get any payment from the County. He wants a fair and honest system for the voters. Someone asked if the testers have disabilities. People with disabilities should be testing the machines. Mr. O'Hanlon said unless people with a broad range of abilities test the machines, not every will be able to use them. Ms. Cleary said Council can get the Task Force involved in the process.

Ms. Stypula suggested that the City and the County could partner with news outlets to inform voters which polling places are accessible. Also how voters can get absentee ballots. If we had a state office, they could assist us with this issue. Someone reiterated the state needs to have people with disabilities looking at these machines. Mr. O'Hanlon said this is happening to some extent on the state level. Ultimately it's the County's decision. Mr. Parker suggested we put together a working group. Mr. O'Hanlon said he would like to be part of the follow-up meeting. County Council Member and Election Board member David Fawcett said they will schedule a public meeting. Mr. Parker said the follow-up next meeting on voting accessibility will be Friday September 30<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 in the Simmons room of the United Way Building. Mr. Dixon asked them to talk about voter registration and voter turnout as well.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:58 PM

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING:

DATE: October 17, 2005  
TIME: 2:00 P.M.  
LOCATION: First Floor Conference Room  
Civic Building, 200 Ross Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219