



Zoe Arthur, Chairwoman
Beverly Anthes
James A. Pope
Paul Ratha Yem

January 9, 2020

EMD

City Manager Eileen M. Donoghue
Mayor John Leahy, and
Members of the Lowell City Council

Re: Motion of 11/26/2019 by C. Conway - Req. City Mgr. Provide a Report Regarding Plan and Responsibility for Setting Up Polling Booths for Handicap Voters.

Dear City Manager Donoghue, Mayor Leahy, and Members of the City Council

I write in response to a request for a report regarding the planning and arraignments the City undertakes to ensure accessibility for handicapped voters at polling locations during local, state, and federal elections. The planning and implementation of accommodations for handicapped voters is conducted through the Elections and Census Office. The Director of Elections, with the assistance of staff and the Law Department, evaluates the City's polling locations to ensure that they possess architectural designs or systems, such as wheelchair access ramps, chair lifts, and elevators, that enable handicapped voters to freely access these places to vote in compliance with 52 U.S.C.A. § 20102, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and other applicable federal and state laws. Additionally, each polling location in the City is provided with an Election Systems and Software (ES&S) AutoMARK ("AutoMARK") machine to assist handicapped voters with the voting process. The AutoMARK is an optical scan ballot reader and marker designed to assist voters unable to mark a ballot due to physical impairments or language barriers. Accessibility features include a touch screen with a zoom and contrast feature, multiple language translation, a keypad marked with Braille, puff-sip interface, and an audio jack with headphone compatibility to enable audio ballot features. Prior to Election Day, Wardens and Clerks are trained in the setup and use of the AutoMARK system during the City's mandatory training sessions. Each AutoMARK is checked and then delivered to each polling location by Department of Public Works in protective cases. On the morning of the election, poll workers assigned to each location open the protective case, set the machine up, and turn the AutoMARK on for use until the close of the polls. After the election, the machines are dismantled and returned to City Hall by DPW personnel.

During the November 5, 2019 Municipal Election, certain issues were identified regarding the City's implementation of the above listed plans. Because only Wardens and Clerks received the full training on setting up an using AutoMARKs, inspectors and translators were not as familiar with the systems or what they were called, resulting in confusion and miscommunication regarding their presence and functioning. Some poll workers also reported difficulties in setting up the machines. AutoMARKs are large and heavy machines that may require two people to safely lift. Due to age, certain poll workers were unable to lift the AutoMARKs, resulting in delays in their setup. Additionally, certain polling locations lacked lower standing tables upon which the AutoMARKs could be set up, resulting in situations where certain AutoMARKs were set up on tables higher up off the ground. This hindered certain voters in wheelchairs from accessing the systems without assistance.

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Based on the Elections Office's assessment of the November 5th, 2019 Municipal Election and in response to these issues raised, new policies have been implemented to improve AutoMARK usage and improve handicap accessibility for future elections. Poll worker training has been revamped so that all poll workers, regardless of position, will be provided training on the setup, use, and ideal placement of AutoMARK machines. This training will also focus on providing assistance to handicapped voters. The Elections Office is in the process of conducting a review of where AutoMARKs are set up at each polling location to see if setup and placement can be improved. Each polling location presents its own set of AutoMARK setup challenges, as local conditions can vary depending on the type of facility the polling place is located, the availability of tables, the location of power conduits/plugs, and voter/pedestrian flow. The Elections Office is also looking at the possibility of having DPW workers set up the AutoMARK machines the night before the election so that elderly poll workers do not have to lift up the heavy machines. These policies and changes will ideally improve the overall setup process and operational use of the AutoMARKs, ensuring greater accessibility and convenience for the City's handicapped voters.

I hope this report is of help and assistance to you. Please contact the Elections and Census Office should you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elliott J. Veloso". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Elliott J. Veloso

Interim Director of Elections

cc: Christine P. O'Connor, City Solicitor