



Image of people sitting at tables at In-person accessible voting demonstration

Delaware Champions The Right To Vote Independently

By Carol King-Ries

During the month of October, the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) celebrates Blind Equality Achievement Month (BEAM). During this month, we bring public awareness of the achievements and advancements in equality for blind and sight impaired people in their communities. In 2023, the Northern Delaware Chapter of the NFB was focused on independent voting. We had an on-line information session in February, and during our celebration of BEAM, we coordinated an in-person, hands on demonstration of the accessible voting machine on October 23rd. Commissioner Anthony Albence and the entire Delaware Department of Elections have been very supportive of our organization's endeavor to get information out to all blind and sight impaired Delawareans about their access to independent voting. Cathleen Carter, Department of Elections, coordinated the in-person voting workshop at the New Castle County Warehouse and Training Center. Drew Brooks demonstrated the ExpressVote XL voting machine's Universal Voting Console. The participants were then able to use the console themselves. It was a learning experience that all participants said made them more confident about voting independently. Some people, like me, have never voted independently since experiencing blindness/sight loss. Everyone said that they are looking forward to using this console during the next election. Democracy Live also demonstrated how to use the electronic return of ballots system that is used in Delaware. Some of the participants shared feedback with them on their experiences using this system with screen readers. Overall, it was an effective event, and there have been inquiries made about having this event in other counties. I truly appreciate the Delaware Department of Elections' support of independent voting for all Delawareans. I think that they received invaluable feedback from this event that will make independent voting even better in Delaware. I would like to especially thank Joann Kingsley, from the Disability Law Center, for her unwavering support of the right to vote for all Delawareans including those with different abilities.