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HAVA Implementation Task Force

NYS BOE Office

Good morning.

I would like to thank the members of the State Board and HAVA Task Force for this opportunity to share a few thoughts. My name is Helen Benlisa, and I am the Project HAVA Coordinator at the Catskill Center for Independence. My job is to administer the upstate portion of New York's Protection and Advocacy for Voter Access grant which covers the 52 counties above Westchester. I am also Co-Chair of the NY Association of Independent Living Election Reform Committee which has recently voiced concerns and shared ideas regarding poll worker training with the Task Force members.

As there have been and will continue to be many challenges to fully implementing HAVA in New York, it is safe to say we are all in general agreement about the basics. We want everyone – ourselves, our family members, our friends and neighbors - to participate in voting in their communities; to know their vote is cast privately, kept secure and accurately counted; and to be treated with respect as they exercise their civic responsibility. We also must acknowledge our different approaches for getting there. Employing a spirit of openness and inclusion for a variety of viewpoints and experience will get us there a bit sooner.

There are tremendous resources here: people with many talents and expertise, people with broad ranges of experience and knowledge, and people who want to ensure voting become as accessible and usable as possible by anyone who is eligible.

As you work to meet the challenges before you, please keep in mind all the resources at your disposal: the ones you are sitting next to, the ones surrounding you in this room, as well the many resources across the state. Know we are able and willing and wanting to be part of the solution.

Helen S. Benlisa

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