

A crucial element missing from this report is accessibility for Deaf and Hard of Hearing voters. The example given on line 720 from Merced County should more often be the norm than the exception. Deaf voters have no reliable way to ask questions or clarify information at the polls; while using a notepad may work for some, about 1 in 5 Deaf adults have reading proficiency at or below the second grade level (Source: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncser/RandD/details.asp?ID=1325>). That means communicating with written English is in accessible. There need to be systems in place that either provide ASL Interpreters at polling sites for the entirety of election day, or an ability for Deaf people to sign up for appointments to vote through their municipality where an interpreter can be arranged for that appointment time.

Additionally, hard of hearing people who are not ASL users face a disadvantage at the polls, particularly at crowded polling sites where poll workers may use verbal cues to arrange people into lines or let a certain number of people inside the site at a given time. I am a Deaf voter, and in the 2020 election I waited over two hours to vote because I did not hear the poll worker calling my last name category (i.e., "voters with last names C through G come inside") and countless people went in front of me. It was not until I went inside to ask, using a speech-to-text app, that I realized I could have voted within 15 minutes of arriving at the site. While these situations are certainly an inconvenience, for many voters they have much more serious ramifications. Missing two hours of pay can be the difference between having dinner on the table and not in many American households, particularly in households where disabled people are the main income earners, as we are frequently underpaid and underemployed.

I urge the NIST to consult Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deafblind voters and accessibility professionals to ensure its recommendations meet the needs of a wider array of voters with disabilities. Thank you for your consideration and please feel free to reach out with any questions-- as a Deaf accessibility professional who has worked on voting access for years, I would be thrilled to discuss this further with you.