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Advancing the rights of Californians with disabilities

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PAI Hosting Election Day Voter Hotline Again for People with Disabilities

Oakland, CA – Californians with disabilities who plan to vote in the upcoming election on June 3, 2008 have an ally in assuring full and equal access to the voting process. With funding from the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), Protection and Advocacy, Inc. (PAI) is sponsoring a toll-free hotline for voters with disabilities who have difficulty accessing polling places, casting ballots or have general questions about the voting process. This is the 4th year PAI has operated the hotline.

The purpose of the hotline is to fix problems on Election Day that are causing disenfranchisement of individuals with disabilities. We know there are many barriers affecting a person's ability to vote such as, limited access to registration materials; wrong information from providers, conservators, relatives, and facility staff about the person's right to vote; judges who take away a person's right to vote when they should not; transportation problems getting to and from the polls; poll access problems for people living in nursing homes and other facilities; poll access barriers such as very limited or no accessible parking or curb ramps; doorways and aisles that are too narrow; voting equipment placed on inaccessible tables or stages; poor disability access trainings for poll workers; and, poll sites said to be "accessible" when they are not.

PAI's hotline is equipped to receive voice and TDD calls. The toll-free number for voice calls is: **800-776-5746**. The toll-free number for TDD calls is: **800-781-4546**. Individuals who speak languages other than English should state their language and an interpreter will be connected to the call. Callers who wish to use the California Relay Service, Speech to Speech Service or Video Relay can dial 711.

Complaints received by PAI's Hotline in the February 5th Primary showed a pattern emerging with the use of new voting machines by people with disabilities. In general, due to a lack of training, cumbersome rules and unfamiliarity with the machines, some poll workers were not ready to ensure privacy in voting or troubleshoot access issues. "PAI wants to make sure that accessible voting machines are available and used properly" says Hillary Sklar, Coordinator of PAI's HAVA program. "We want to avoid problems such as no paper for the machines or equipment that will not tally votes until at least 4 people have used it. The Hotline gives us an opportunity to document and address such barriers."

About Protection & Advocacy, Inc.

PAI is a non-profit advocacy agency that provides free legal services to advance the human and legal rights of Californians have disabilities. Under HAVA, PAI is charged with ensuring "the full participation in the electoral process for individuals with disabilities, including registering to vote, casting a vote and accessing polling places." Since receiving HAVA funds, PAI has engaged in a range of voting-related activities, including registering Californians with disabilities to vote, developing nonpartisan educational materials, providing education and outreach, working with the Secretary of State and county election officials and helping voters with their individual voting issues.