



California's protection and advocacy system

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Disability Advocacy Groups Outraged by Challenge to Right to Vote of Californians with Developmental Disabilities

SACRAMENTO, CA –

“It is an outrage that in 2008, as all Americans proceed to the polls for this critical election, some groups are still challenging the right of people with developmental disabilities to vote,” stated Marinda Reed, coordinator of the developmental disability peer training unit of Disability Rights California.

The Californian Republican party has asked the secretary of state to investigate a voting project of the Thumbs Up! adult care center in Tuolumne County, where around 10 clients submitted absentee ballots with the assistance of the center’s director. Reed commented, “We recently completed a training at this center and many others to make sure that all the clients were aware that voting is one of their most fundamental rights and at the heart of participation as citizens. ”

Hillary Sklar, coordinator of the voting initiative of Disability Rights California, emphasized that all people with disabilities have the right to vote, just like any other citizen, unless a court has found them unable to do so. Sklar pointed out that, “Luckily, most of our problems on voting day have to do with inaccessible polling places, quirks of the new voting equipment and lack of training on how to ensure voting is confidential – it is

rare that the right to vote of people with disabilities is challenged. We obviously need to do more public education about the rights of Californians with disabilities.”

This recent challenge to the rights of people with developmental disabilities has also been criticized by People First of California, a membership group that is run by and for people with development disabilities to advocate for themselves. Joe Meadours, Executive Director of People First of California, reports that “state law allows any voter to seek assistance completing a ballot even at a polling location. Why should people with developmental disabilities be treated any differently or people think we are being told what to do?”

Disability Rights California will operate a Voting Hotline on November 4 to help troubleshoot problems encountered by voters with disabilities. For details, visit www.disabilityrightsca.org or contact Hillary Sklar.