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August 1, 2017

Honorable Ricardo Lara
Chair, Appropriations Committee
California State Senate
Capitol Building, Room 5050
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 973 (LOW) – SUPPORT

Dear Senator Lara:

Disability Rights California, a non-profit advocacy organization that advances and protects the rights of Californians with disabilities, supports AB 973. This bill is scheduled for hearing in the Senate Appropriations Committee on August 21, 2017.

Existing law requires the Secretary of State to certify or conditionally approve a remote accessible vote by mail system. Existing law permits a voter, including a voter with a disability or a military or overseas voter, to apply for and receive a vote by mail ballot from a county elections official. Current law also authorizes specified counties to conduct an election as an all-mailed ballot election if certain requirements are satisfied, including requirements relating to accessibility by voters with disabilities.

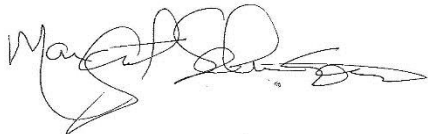
This bill, beginning January 1, 2020, would require a county elections official to permit a voter with a disability, or a military or overseas voter, to cast a ballot using a certified remote accessible vote by mail system.

This requirement would not apply to a county when conducting an all-mailed ballot election.

Vote by mail, while useful for some people with disabilities, is inaccessible for numbers of voters with disabilities, such as those who are blind, have manual dexterity disabilities or learning disabilities. As you know, paper ballots are not accessible to people with certain disabilities because they cannot read or mark the ballot unassisted, which means they cannot vote privately or independently as required by the federal Help America Vote Act. People with disabilities need alternatives to vote privately and independently when paper ballots are not accessible to them, such as a remote accessible vote by mail system. We appreciate Assembly Member Low's leadership in this area. This bill will help ensure people with disabilities can vote on an accessible vote by mail system.

For these reasons, we support this bill. Please contact me if you have any questions about our position on this bill.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Margaret Johnson", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Margaret Johnson, Esq.
Advocacy Director
Disability Rights California

cc: Honorable Evan Low, California State Assembly
Monica Tong, Legislative Aide, Office of Assembly Member Low
Honorable Members, Senate Appropriations Committee
Robert Ingenito, Consultant, Senate Appropriations Committee