Accessible All-Candidates Meeting Coalition

Following the last federal election, four organizations, The Canadian Hearing Society, Canadian Paraplegic Association Ontario (CPAO), Canadian Helen Keller Centre and CNIB—formed a committee to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in the electoral process. Fueled by the success of five landmark fully accessible all-candidates meetings in pilot communities in January, 2006, the organizations sought to make a difference in the provincial election. These historic meetings were universally well-received and in the words of one deaf-blind participant: "For the first time, I felt part of the voting process in a way I have never experienced in my 35 years as a voter."

To advance this work, the Accessible All-Candidates Meeting Coalition (AACMC) was formed. The common purpose is to extend and ensure opportunities for persons with disabilities to have equal access to democratic and electoral processes across Ontario.

Ontarians with disabilities have historically faced barriers to the full citizenship and participation. In 2005 the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act was enacted recognizing and aiming to address those very barriers. Through the Democratic Renewal Secretariat, Ontario is seeking ways to engage citizens with their government and their communities in meaningful ways.

Government cannot represent constituents with whom they cannot reach or communicate society as a whole loses when people with disabilities are unable to volunteer, make educated choices about candidates (via vehicles such as all-candidates meetings), vote, or run for office. As was reaffirmed in the Federal Court's decision, citing that people with disabilities (Deaf Canadians in this case) are entitled to be full participants in the democratic process and the full functioning of government. This decision will no doubt have far-reaching effects. It is a significant decision not only for deaf people, but for the entire disability community.

Our project is aimed at ensuring society can enable Ontarians with disabilities to exercise their full citizenship-as voters, as candidates, as volunteers, and as citizens The AACM Committee is working with Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) Accessibility Directorate, Democratic Renewal Secretariat, Ontario Citizens Assembly on Electoral Reform, Elections Ontario, Elections Canada, Association of Municipalities of Ontario, and Association of Municipal Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario to work together to make sure the democratic process is accessible to all voters, candidates, volunteers and citizens.

The Project-Count Us In: Barrier Removal in the Electoral Process

This project in partnership with MCSS and AACM aims to promote accessibility awareness in provincial election campaigns by developing an education strategy to be implemented during the 2007 Provincial election. This strategy will centre on a series of “Pocket Guides” to accessibility to be developed and distributed to selected stakeholders during the election campaign. The pocket guides will be made available in alternative formats and will be promoted to key community stakeholders through a communications and promotions plan to be developed by the project partners.