

March, 2013

Protection and Advocacy for Voting Access (PAVA)
Fiscal Year 2014 Appropriations Recommendation- \$7.5 million

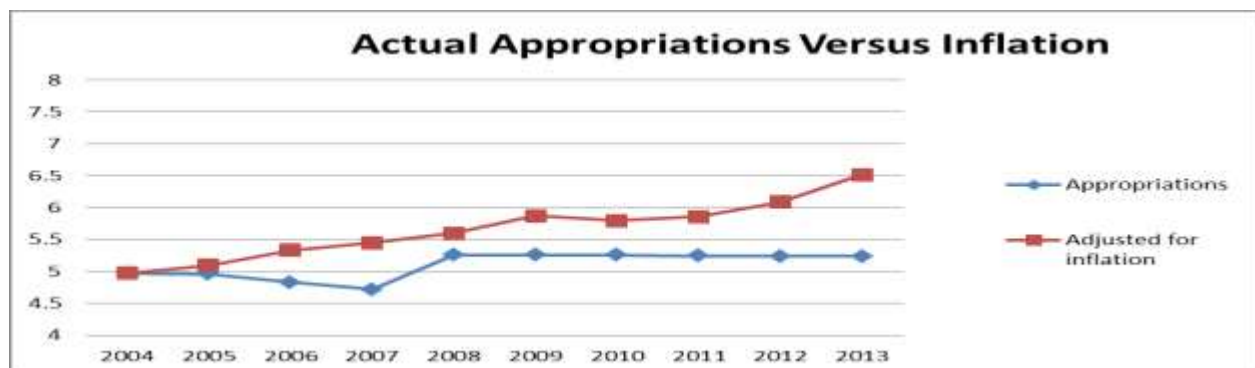
Background / Funding History

In 2002, Congress passed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). One purpose of HAVA is to make voting systems across the country more accessible to people with disabilities. The law acknowledges the unique obstacles faced by people with disabilities at the polls, and authorizes funding for the Protection and Advocacy for Voting Access program. The PAVA program is administered by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.

A Government Accountability Office report from 2009 (<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09685.pdf>) found that 72 percent of polling places surveyed on Election Day 2008 had impediments that hindered physical access or limited the opportunities for private and independent voting for people with disabilities. While this is an improvement over the 84 percent of polling places that had impediments in a similar study done during the 2000 election, there remains much work to be done to fully achieve private and independent voting for people with disabilities. Other barriers encountered include a lack of voting and registration materials in accessible formats for people with sensory disabilities, and outright denial of the right to register and vote based on false assumptions about a person's legal capacity to vote.

PAVA was funded at \$5.3 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2008, and since then has been either level funded or cut. Because PAVA advocates continued to find problems with accessibility in the 2012 election, including untrained or inadequately trained poll workers, inaccessible polling places, and long lines, it is important for funding in FY 2014 to be increased so the PAVA program can continue to work to reduce barriers faced by people with disabilities when voting.

NDRN recommends a funding level of \$7.5 million for FY 2014.



Current Program Responsibilities

HAVA charges the Protection & Advocacy System with helping to ensure the full participation of individuals with disabilities in the entire electoral process, including registering to vote, casting a ballot, and accessing polling places. PAVA advocates are on the ground in communities and states, providing advice, technical assistance, and training to election officials about voting accessibility for a wide array of disabilities. They also provide outreach, training, and direct representation to individuals with disabilities and the agencies and organizations that serve them.

Since the U.S. Election Assistance Commission's standards for voting machines went into effect in December 2007, PAVA advocates have also been tasked with helping states and communities understand and comply with the new accessibility provisions.

When PAVA advocates learned that the States were not spending their entire voter access grant funds, they increased their work with the States to help them more effectively direct those funds to improve accessibility. Although those funds were cut in FY 2012, PAVA grantees will continue to work with the Secretaries of State to encourage them to increase the level of accessibility of polling places.

Passage of HAVA was a milestone for the disability community. For the first time, federal legislation guaranteed voters with disabilities their right to a private and independent vote. This achievement, however, is a reminder that the intent of past legislation to secure voting rights for voters with disabilities remains, in many ways, unfulfilled. The United States has always championed free and fair elections and the right of each individual to cast a private and independent ballot. The PAVA program must be adequately funded to ensure that Americans with disabilities -- who have faced a multitude of barriers to exercising their right to vote -- can fully participate in the democratic process.

For more information, contact Eric Buehlmann or Patrick Wojahn at 202-408-9514, eric.buehlmann@ndrn.org or patrick.wojahn@ndrn.org.