

Interview with Catherine Vest, Communication and Outreach Specialist

May 8, 2020

Jessica Trimble (JT): All right. Hello everyone. We are back. My name is Jessica Trimble. And I am the Director of Communication and Outreach at Indiana Disability Rights. And today we are going to talk about voting in the Indiana primary election during COVID-19. I'm sure you've heard a lot of things going on and changes. So we just want to give you the right information. Today I'm actually interviewing my staff member, Catherine Vest. And you will see Cats next to me on the video over here I believe. So this is going to be a little bit different than some of our other videos. So Diane is below me and she's interpreting for what I am saying. And then Amy is below Catherine. And Amy is actually going to be voicing for Catherine. So just to kind of explain the setup. With that, Cat would you introduce yourself?

Catherine Vest (CV): Hello everyone. My name is Cat. I am the Communication Outreach Specialist for IDR. I do a lot of different things related to communication. Currently, I'm focusing on running our voting program here at IDR.

JT: So Cat, voting is going to look a little bit different this year, isn't it?

CV: Yes, it will.

JT: So right now a lot of our voters are used to being able to either vote in person early or just vote in person on election day. But with the need to socially distance and keep some other precautions in place, we've been hearing a lot more about vote by mail. So could you explain what voting by mail is?

CV: Sure, so voting by mail is where you have the opportunity to vote from the comfort of your own home. You receive a ballot in the mail and that includes your voter information and your voter ID card, which I do have an example of that I can show you later. I will say it's a really cool method that you can use to still express your vote. So what you do with that, is it's considered a no fault voting method. Meaning you do not need to necessarily give a reason why you want to vote by mail for the primary. This is considered as a public emergency sort of situation. Therefore, you do not have to express a specific reason as why you want to vote by mail. You can just go ahead and send in your ballot that way.

JT: Right, so let me make sure I understand the difference. So normally when you're going to vote absentee by mail, there's a list of reasons that you need to vote absentee by mail. And you have to check one of those reasons.

CV: Yes.

JT: But in the current environment, there is no need to check a reason, right? You're just allowed to vote by mail. So you don't have to worry about choosing a reason of why you need to vote by mail.

CV: That's absolutely correct. Typically, they have very strict criteria that you need to meet to vote absentee. But again, that was pre COVID-19 world, which is, as of we all know we live in a very different world right now. So you don't have to provide that reason like you would have before.

JT: Okay, so I'm registered to vote and how do I get my ballot?

CV: So I want to explain real quick on how you apply for that method of voting as well. There's a couple different ways depending on what you prefer to do. There's a paper application you can fill out or there is an online application. This is what the paper application looks like. And on the back is a list of counties, so you select which one you live in. So on the Secretary of State's website you can download the online application. You can print it off and fill it out and send it into your County Clerk if you like. And you can receive your ballot that way. You can also fill out the application online and then they'll send you the ballot through the mail that way. It's pretty easy. You will probably have to set up your voter profile or account that way. But once you get that set up and you're logged in and registered and everything, there'll be tabs along the left side of the screen and it's pretty user-friendly to go ahead and fill that application out online. You should receive a confirmation once it's all finished. Just make sure that you get it in before the 21st. Once you receive that paper you can send in your ballot as soon as you like. In my experience with the mail, you'll want to make sure and have it three or four-day leeway just because of how the mail functions. But they do recommend sending it in at least the week beforehand. And this is what the ballot looks like. Once you receive it in the mail, this is what the envelope will look like. And within that envelope you'll receive several different things with your ballot. So there'll be the absentee form that just kind, and it will inform you of your rights to vote in this manner. And it will include instructions on how to make sure your votes is done properly and it will have the confidentiality note on this. So on the application, it'll note whether you're Republican or Democrat, if that's something that you've registered as. So you can read through all of that on the left side of this paper. So there'll be a smaller envelope here that will contain all of this information. With that, you're going to want to make sure that the card itself has two signatures, from whether that's Republican or Democrat, whatever you're registered as. So if it's not correct, make sure you call the County Clerk and have that fixed. But it should have the two signatures, and all of that information on there. So that's your card, that's your proof so to speak. And I just remembered, you're going to want to make sure that you write with a number 2 pencil, there're specific instructions for that. Once you're done you place it back in the envelope and it is prepaid postage. It has the address already printed out on it, ready to go. You will have to make sure you sign that as well. I don't know if you can see right here, but there's the address and then you can post it in the mail. Three things you need to note when you mail it back. Make sure you have the ballot card, that tiny envelope that I just showed you, and the bigger envelope that it will mail back in. And that all comes with instructions and everything, but that does not necessarily need to be sent back in with your ballot. That is something for you to keep. And again, make sure you have it before that deadline of June 3rd. When

you receive your ballot, I recommend going ahead and filling it out and sending it as soon as possible to ensure you've got plenty of time that it arrives before you need to send it in.

JT: June 2nd.

CV: June 2nd is the due date, not the third

JT: Right, so the election, yeah, primary election day is on June 2nd this year. It did get moved. So make sure you have that ballot in by June 2nd. And so what you're saying is the Secretary of State's office actually recommends getting it in a week early, right? All right, let me pull up my calendar real quick and see what that would actually be. Okay, so May 26th is kind of our goal date to get these sent in. That gives it a week to get to either the County Clerk or Secretary of State's office.

CV: Yes, and that May 26th is perfectly set up. So if a person decides that they actually don't want to vote by mail, they want to go vote in person, then you still have that May 26th through June 2nd time. But understand that your County Clerk's office has a limited number of staff right now. So make sure you're looking at your local voter information on what times they're going to be available in your specific area. There's lots of information online for that.

JT: Okay, so we've got a lot of information and a lot of items that you shared. And I want to let people know that we're going to post pictures of those on our website. We have a hoosiersvote.org website, Hoosiersvote.org. And we'll have pictures of everything there. So if it's difficult for you to see on your screen, we're going to have that information there, so you can get visual recognition of what you're looking for. So Cat, remind us again, what is the date we need to apply for the application, either through our County Clerk's office or Secretary of State.

CV: So with the County Clerk's or the Secretary of State, you must have it received by May 21st.

JT: Okay.

CV: As a requirement.

JT: Okay, so May 21st is when we need to apply for our vote by mail ballot.

CV: Yes. Now if you go for the online option, you have until May 21st. But also you have to remember that if you're going to have it by mail, it has to be before 11:59 that evening. So there is a specific timestamp that must be completed by for online. If you choose to fill out the paper application and mail it in, then make sure you're planning that extra time for it to arrive before May 21st. So if you want to go ahead and fill that paper application out, I would encourage you to do it now when you are able to, to ensure you have plenty of time.

JT: So, we all live in a world where we love to track things, we love to track our online orders and we love to know when a delivery person is bringing it. So how do you track the status of your absentee ballot application or your vote by mail application?

CV: So you can go to [IndianaVoters.com](https://www.IndianaVoters.com) and you'll be able to find the general mail under your account. And you can click on your ballot and see exactly where it's at in the process and when you should be expecting to receive your ballot. When that's going to be sent from the main office, to the County Clerk's, to your home.

JT: Great! So once they've received our ballot, we should be able to look online and know that they've gotten it, right?

CV: Yes, that's right.

JT: All right. So again, we want to let people know that there still will be opportunities to vote in person, but be prepared that it's going to be limited this year. But we are recommending to vote by mail just because if you're concerned about social distancing, if you're concerned about transportation or other things, vote by mail is probably going to be your best option, correct?

CV: Yes, that's absolutely correct. With that, you're able to maintain more control over your situation. It's really nice to be able to work on that more comfortable timeline that you yourself decide.

JT: Now as you're going through this process, if you have some questions about voting or how to do this, can people contact you, Cat?

CV: Yes. Either myself or you can get in touch with your County Clerk's office or the Secretary of State office. If you have specific questions, you can contact us at IDR, Indiana Disability Rights or the County Clerk. Or you can also look on the website, our hoosiers, sorry our website is [IndianaVoters.com](https://www.IndianaVoters.com). And there's more information specific for your local county that you can check with. There's also the Secretary of State's website, that will list who you need to get in contact specifically with about your questions.

JT: Great, and like I said, we will put all of those phone numbers, email addresses and websites on our webpage and then in the comment section of these videos, to make it easier for people to find that. We know it's hard to watch a video and try to write all that information down. So we will make sure that's easily accessible for people. And as a reminder, if you're concerned about your rights being violated because you have a disability, please contact Indiana Disability Rights. You can contact our intake advocates, Dan and Mary, at 1800.622.4845. So, Cat, is there anything else that you want to share about voting in Indiana's primary election this year?

CV: Yes, I would like to kind of piggyback on what you just said. Do not allow COVID-19 to violate your rights as a voter. Make sure that you're advocating for yourself and making your voice heard, whether that's going to vote in person or absentee voting. If

anything is wrong, like with the signatures, make sure you're reaching out to the County Clerk's office to get that amended. Make sure that you're reading about your rights as an absentee voter, so that none of those rights get violated. So again, they are your rights and don't let anyone impede them.

JT: All right, well, thank you Cat for being on camera and being willing to be interviewed. Thank you to Amy and Diane for your help. We really appreciate you. And with that we'll say thank you and we'll continue to do interview updates as new information comes out about voting during COVID-19.

CV: Stay safe everyone, be healthy.