

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

15 February 2019

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Secretary Toulouse Oliver Awarded “Outstanding Innovations in Elections” by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission

Blind and Visually Impaired Absentee Ballot System Recognized

SANTA FE – New Mexico Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver has received the 2018 “Clearie” Award for Outstanding Innovations in Elections by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) for her implementation of a new electronic ballot software system that allows blind and visually impaired voters to independently and privately cast an absentee ballot.

“Every eligible voter deserves the dignity and convenience of being able to mark their ballot in an independent and private manner, which is exactly what our electronic ballot system does for blind and visually impaired voters,” said Secretary Toulouse Oliver. “I want to thank the U.S. Election Administration Commission for this award and I want to dedicate it to the determined efforts of New Mexico’s blind and visually impaired community who worked closely with me and my Office to ensure blind and visually impaired voters have fair and equal access to the ballot box.”

According to the [EAC](#), the annual “Clearie” awards “recognize best practices in election administration and highlight exemplary models which can serve as examples to other officials and jurisdictions.”

“We are thrilled to recognize Secretary Toulouse Oliver and her team for their innovative approach to serving voters with disabilities,” said EAC Chairman Thomas Hicks. “We are proud to share details about this program with election officials across the nation, as well as the voters they serve.”

Secretary Toulouse Oliver and her staff worked closely with the National Federation of the Blind of New Mexico and the New Mexico Commission for the Blind to create the system that allows blind and visually impaired voters to independently mark, print, and return their absentee ballot. As [KOB News 4 noted](#) in 2018 as the Secretary of State announced the new system, “New Mexico is leading the country when it comes to making absentee voting more accessible.”

“The National Federation of the Blind of New Mexico deeply appreciates Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver,” said Adelmo Vigil, President of the National Federation of the Blind of New Mexico. “Because of her work, blind voters in New Mexico, for the very first time in history, can now independently and privately mark the printed absentee ballot using the low-vision and nonvisual access technology of their choice. Secretary Toulouse Oliver worked closely with us to make this happen. She provided public testimony and support for the legislation that brought all of this about. She is a true friend of the blind.”

Greg Trapp, Executive Director of the New Mexico Commission for the Blind added to Mr. Vigil’s remarks, saying, "Because of the efforts of Secretary of State Toulouse Oliver and of the National Federation of the Blind, blind and visually impaired citizens of New Mexico can now fully and equally participate in the fundamental right to vote. This is a tremendous step forward, and New Mexico can take pride in what the Secretary of State and National Federation of the Blind have accomplished"

More information about the U.S Election Assistance Commission:

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC) was established by the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). It is an independent, bipartisan commission charged with ensuring secure, accurate and accessible elections by developing guidance to meet HAVA requirements, adopting voluntary voting system guidelines, and serving as a national clearinghouse of information on election administration. EAC also accredits testing laboratories and certifies voting systems, as well as administers the use of HAVA funds.

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