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Act 133 Working Group Meeting Transcript - December 18, 2025

0:02

We're not able to.

0:05

There may have been a few people who declined the invite, but no direct communication.

0:11

OK.

0:16

Good morning, Susan.

0:35

OK, the recording has been started.

0:38

Great.

0:40

OK, well anyone who joins us will welcome obviously, but it is 837 so I think it's time to get started.

0:54

I hope that you all had the opportunity to review the current draft of the report.

1:03

We received feedback from many, I wouldn't say from most, but we received feedback from many and we incorporated that throughout the entire document.

1:17

I will say that we tried to keep the voice of the report the same and the the level of depth the same.

1:28

So that may be reflected and our office feels very good with where this report is at this moment.

1:39

But we'd like to hear feedback of course.

1:41

And the steps forward are we are going to start after this meeting working on the executive summary and the conclusion which will be relatively predictable should not be a surprise to anybody based on what the report is.

2:01

And we will circulate that we have not received any addendums yet and but we can also did not give a deadline for addendum.

2:12

So we have vans, but I was my understanding that Megan was maybe still working on that.

2:21

OK, So what we are thinking is to get addendums if people want to submit them before the new year and then we will put them all the whole report together.

2:40

So hopefully people have a good idea of where they're going already with addendums.

2:45

This is not a surprise, but we would like to get the addendum, the whole report in before the Legislature starts.

2:54

That is our goal and the way to do that is to get the addendums before the new year.

3:01

So does that timeline time frame work for people who are planning to submit addendums?

3:07

I don't know who is, but if you are planning to submit an addendum, does that time frame work?

3:17

I see Jessica and Kate nodding.

3:19

OK, great.

3:20

Thank you, Megan.

3:29

Does that mean can you give a date when you say before the end of the new year?

3:33

Does that mean like the 20, because I assume you all 31st, the 31st And then does what I've submitted before were comments that was sort of a like summary of our participation in the working group, not an addendum.

3:51

So I might I was waiting to see how the report shaped up so that our addendum makes sense in response to I figured that was the posture of almost everybody.

4:05

So that's why we didn't want the, you know, we didn't want to have a deadline of today because that would not give people maybe enough time to absorb the report.

4:15

So, yes, so you can modify what you have submitted to us, Megan, in any way that you want and submit it by the 31st.

4:30

We will not be editing doing anything to the addendums.

4:34

They'll be attached as are and we will put them in probably alphabetical order by group and at the end of the report and they'll be indexed at the end of the report.

4:48

So then we'll go last.

4:50

Megan, the glory of being AV Well, Vermont League of Cities and Towns is last.

4:58

Oh, the the alphabet strikes again.

5:01

Yes.

5:01

Sorry, I didn't mean to correct you, but yeah, No, it's fine.

5:05

That is my life.

5:07

Susan, I just wanted to check in on the best practice guide.

5:15

I didn't know what the timing was for that.

5:18

It seems like lots of the double S in the details kind of content is in that one and I didn't know what the process was going to be for reviewing that.

5:28

That's an excellent question and one that I was hoping we could talk about today.

5:34

That's fine right now.

5:35

Yeah.

5:37

So we can jump to that because I want to make sure that Laura's going to leave at 10.

5:42

So I want to make sure that you have the ability to hear this too, Laura.

5:47

I think what we will do is provide an outline structure of the best practices based on what There was a whole meeting about that.

5:59

We also had that spreadsheet about breast best practices and in emerging practices.

6:08

So we will create a, a framework for the best practices guide and indicate, you know, where we think it should be elaborated by this group or where it should just be primarily links to other groups as we've talked about in the past.

6:33

I don't think, and I think we have relative consensus based on last meeting that it makes sense to recreate all the resources that are currently available in the world.

6:47

It makes sense to link the resources that are currently available into the world and then supplement where it seems prudent or the right thing to do.

7:01

Otherwise we will make the perfect enemy of the good and be working on the best practices guide for a very, very long time.

7:10

So we would like to provide that resource as quickly as possible.

7:17

This is these are questions that our office is receiving all the time.

7:21

I'm sure all of you are as well.

7:23

So if possible we will create and we haven't created a timeline for that work, but we will and and we will get the framework to all of you as quickly as possible.

7:46

Does that sound like a suitable plan, a plan?

7:50

Is there any augments to that plan?

7:55

So I'm a little clear on how the review, is that similar to this where there'll be review back and forth kind of thing or yes, yes, I suspect that we'll have at least one, if not two group meetings about best practices guide.

8:09

And I'm hoping that people will provide links that they think are useful on the best practices topics that are in the framework that we provide.

8:21

And then we can compile all those links and talk about them at our first best practices meeting and then work on the feedback that we received then.

8:33

And then come back and review it one more time.

8:36

And then hopefully and then hopefully then it will hopefully be wrapped up.

8:45

That is my hope.

8:47

And yes, Megan, I see your comment.

8:49

We can absolutely put this in writing.

8:51

We just haven't made the plan yet nor put it in writing.

8:54

But we we will.

8:55

And I agree that is good for me too and useful for everybody.

9:03

Jessica, I think in the report, it said that the best practices guide would be coming out in January 2026.

9:12

That list date is going to have to change based on this plan.

9:17

Yeah, that was a like a a wishful hope when we thought that maybe we would be able to file this report by the end of November, but that that all of this has moved forward.

9:31

And I think we're going to have to change that date before we file this report.

9:37

But to what?

9:37

I don't know because we need to create a work plan and I don't have a work plan yet.

9:49

OK.

9:50

We have a plan for best practices.

9:52

We have a deadline for addendums.

9:59

We have a basic plan for when we want to get the report into the Legislature.

10:11

And then ideally, you know, we'll have to create a work plan, but ideally my goal would be to have best practices wrapped up by the middle to end of February because I think that would be wonderful.

10:27

Whether or not we'll be able to do that, I don't know, But I think that would be wonderful for the communities that we all serve.

10:33

And also given that this is not going to be the creation of a ton of content, maybe possible.

10:41

So I'm always optimistic and so try and keep that optimism.

10:49

All right, in terms of feedback on the executive summary and the conclusion, we will strive to get that to you as quickly as possible and then give you all a week to review it and provide feedback.

11:12

Is that reasonable understanding that that week will not include between the well really that week will not include the next two weeks because that is an unreasonable expectation on our side.

11:32

So a week after the new year, does that sound OK?

11:41

Again, should not be anything surprising, but Jessica, do you have feedback on that or is that a lingering hand?

11:52

OK, Susan, just wondering, I think of the legislature as starting pretty early in January.

11:59

Am I wrong about that?

12:00

Just not sure They're starting on the 6th.

12:03

OK, yeah, I'll let you guys do the math.

12:06

Sounds tight.

12:07

There's Yeah.

12:08

No, we're not going to be able to get it in before, as I was thinking through providing you folks reasonable feedback time.

12:17

We're not going to be able to get it in before the Legislature starts because the 6th is a Tuesday.

12:22

And if we're giving you it on the second or before the 2nd, which would be awesome, then you would need, you know, until whatever the Friday is of the week of the 5th.

12:39

I should be able to do that math, but that's not my skill.

12:41

And so then we would need to file it sometime in the following week, the second week of January.

12:50

And that's OK.

12:51

The legislature really is warming up that first week.

12:55

There's a lot of pomp and circumstance, lot of things happening.

12:59

And I suspect this will not be on the radar of a lot of people.

13:06

The other thing that people should know is that when we file reports, we follow, obviously the Legislature's report filing guidance, which is that we send the reports to legislative reports and also to the full committees of jurisdiction, which in this case are Senate and House government operations.

13:32

So those members will receive a copy of this report directly and then it will be posted on the Legislature's report website.

13:43

Kate, thank you.

13:45

One of the things we talked about, oh gosh, forever ago back in the spring was ensuring that the guide that we create is fully accessible, including images and the selection of font, etcetera, etcetera.

14:02

I just want to make sure that that has been planned for before that is submitted to the Legislature because that can take time as well.

14:09

Absolutely.

14:10

That is part of our plan, Megan.

14:16

If I'm asked to give testimony, our office will be giving testimony.

14:21

I suspect I would not be the only or this office would not be the only group that would be asked to give testimony if the committee's take it up.

14:30

And I certainly would recommend that other people be heard from as well.

14:36

Frank, is there an idea when the committee might start on this?

14:40

I have no idea when the when either committee would start on this.

14:45

And no, I don't know.

14:49

There's a lot of competing priorities I'm aware of and I don't know when this would come up.

15:02

I don't have any control over that.

15:04

So yeah.

15:13

OK.

15:15

Megan, sort of on Frank's question, it doesn't and and correct me if I'm wrong, we're not really recommend the working group's not really recommending any legislation or there are a few things that are recommended and then there's a few things that don't have a strong recommendation to that.

15:42

But if the legislature wanted to change the policy or the way that things operated, they would need to do it through the legislative process.

15:52

So the report does call out things that would require legislative change to happen.

16:04

I have a question, Megan.

16:06

I yes, just one second, Laura.

16:08

Megan, I couldn't hear what you were just saying.

16:10

I don't know if you went back on mute.

16:12

I said I will look more carefully for that.

16:16

OK.

16:16

I you know, the executive summary will help with that because I think it will put things into, you know, what is recommended and what are things that could be modified that require legislative change.

16:34

Laura because the divorce because because I'm I'm a special member of this group.

16:40

I'm the cheer at a guest.

16:44

The possibility of them acting me to testify possible.

16:48

Well, we did put your name in the report, so into my department now.

16:57

So if you don't want that, let us.

16:59

No, no, no, it's fine.

17:00

I just need to give them a heads up.

17:01

And I planned that because when I mentioned it to my commissioner, that would come with this meeting and she was like, why?

17:07

And I was like, I'm here, Am I wrong?

17:08

As the director, you know, yes.

17:11

No, it it makes logical sense to me while you're here.

17:14

And it would make logical sense to me that they would want to.

17:19

I'm just to clarify, January 6th, isn't that the state of state address That is the day that people are coming back.

17:28

I think the state of the state probably will be Thursday the 8th.

17:31

It's usually, it's usually it's on a Thursday after people sort of get reacquainted.

17:37

But but it could.

17:41

I haven't heard yet the state of the state.

17:44

I've been commooking with BPR and WCAF to make sure that the state of the state is fully acceptable using ASL interpreters and capturing with nothing being blocked using picture on picture.

18:03

Awesome.

18:05

But they have to drop a proposal for the Dodge that they approve on because apparently the space you have to get permission if we're going to add more people in the main room.

18:17

Yeah, there's a lot of rules around that.

18:24

I would be surprised that it's not the 8th but I I'll be invited along with the office but I don't.

18:39

OK.

18:40

Any other logistical things that should be brought up that I maybe haven't thought of or that need to be addressed?

18:58

OK, hearing none, let's move forward to feedback on the report.

19:06

And I'll just preface by saying I'm confident that things that everybody doesn't love, but So what I'm looking for is feedback that we haven't received or feedback that you feel was not hurt.

19:34

Awesome.

19:34

Everybody loves it.

19:37

This is great.

19:39

No any feedback?

19:50

Megan I, I made some comments.

19:53

Would it be appropriate just to send those in to Kelly or Jenny?

20:01

Would it, would it just be, would it be helpful to send those in?

20:05

Well, are they significant changes?

20:09

Megan I don't know.

20:11

I don't, I don't know how to I don't think so.

20:15

I don't think significant.

20:16

They're, you know, places that.

20:19

It's like, oh, this is seems like a place that any I'm not sure how to punch it.

20:28

OK, are they changes in policy?

20:33

No.

20:34

OK, would folks like to hear Megan's comments or we can make them and and send out the report again?

20:51

Here's an example of one on the language access.

20:55

I said.

20:56

I asked if there isn't a state requirement to provide language access at least at state level meetings and can we build on what has been done there?

21:04

Because it seemed like it was seems like we're just saying we had we had mixed feelings and rather than saying, you know, the state has mandated language access at state level meetings of judiciary, there's work to be built on.

21:21

And I loved the paragraph above that mentioned, you know, say yes first.

21:26

And that helps you, that will help you learn and find a way forward when responding to, you know, accessibility requests.

21:38

So in that sense that is like it starts with presented mixed views on requiring rather than again that kind of yes, first.

21:50

So it's a little bit, it's a little bit of tweaky language, but but specifically the question of,

and I may be wrong about that, but my understanding is that there's a language access requirement at the state level and judiciary that we could build on.

22:15

OK.

22:17

I can't see the full text of the comment and I don't know who made it.

22:26

Kelly, can you read me that comment and what it is?

22:30

Thank you, Megan.

22:31

I don't know if it's it's putting it too.

22:36

I think it was my comment.

22:37

I'm happy to read that if you would like.

22:39

Yeah.

22:40

OK.

22:40

Oh, I can.

22:41

Jenny just shared it with me.

22:42

Kate, thank you.

22:43

I mean, you can read it.

22:45

I'll read it out loud.

22:45
It's not.

22:47
It's it's too bad.

22:49
Yeah.

22:49
Thank you.

22:50
So this is an important piece of framing, I believe just for the impacts moving forward for elections.

22:57
So a piece of framing feedback from my former work.

23:00
Throughout the report, there is reference to quote during COVID.

23:04
I believe the intent is for these lines should be quote during 2020 and during 2021 or perhaps quote at the start of COVID.

23:12
The reason I mentioned this is that we are currently in a 12th wave and the rates based on surveillance data for the past two weeks is that one in 35 Vermonters last week and now one in 39 Vermonters this week are currently infected.

23:25
This is higher than at any point during 2020 or 2021.

23:30
Ongoing and new pandemics will certainly pose impacts on Vermonters access to government and elections in the future ahead.

23:37
So it is a framing suggestion to accurately reflect that.

23:42
Kate, that framing suggestion is well received and we will make that shift.

23:48

Did you have a comment going on?

23:49

Oh, no, I, I knew about that.

23:50

I knew about the 15 language AFI of one of them.

23:59

OK, Department in general, when it come to people like the Office of Leisure Equity, they have the funding that allowed them to translate banal document, but they have to I guess their criteria of how they decide how much money they can give to each state agency to translate the document.

24:21

I don't know if they ran out of the funding yet.

24:25

Yeah.

24:33

Any other big feedback, essential feedback that we should hear, Susan.

24:46

Yeah.

24:48

So I, I think what Megan is saying makes sense that if, I mean, my gosh, if there's and throughout the report, I think you did it right at the beginning, you talk about, OK, here's what's law, here's what we have to do and, and, and make very clear what is, you know, the difference between requirements and then best practice.

25:07

And I think what Megan is saying is we need to talk about language translation in terms of the law and then offer the possibility of building on that.

25:21

I, I do think that we had a whole survey process of, of these groups in terms of which things need changes.

25:31

So I don't, I'm assuming that you're not talking about actually making a recommendation that what didn't No, no, nothing.

25:42

The recommendations that are in the report right now, Susan, are the recommendations that will stay.

25:50

But I think what what I heard Megan say was referring to what Jessica posted, which is the documents, the recommendation on the documents and I thought it was a should be rather than a have to be, but I'll have to go look at the guidance again.

26:06

I haven't read it recently, but I will now that Jessica's posted it.

26:10

So I know that we, we translate into I think 8 or 9 languages on just standard practice for the things that we have deemed vital documents, which is debatable, honestly.

26:28

Like I think there's not as much, you know, it's not like they list every single vital document because they can't.

26:38

But that is a conversation we have on some things.

26:41

For instance, we have a lot of professionals.

27:01

All right.

27:07

For instance, a great example for us is we have occupational licensure and that is an application that is done in a computer system by necessity.

27:21

And that is, I believe at this point we have almost 300 different applications because there's lots of different pathways into our over 165 profession types.

27:37

And so we have decided not to translate every single application in every language, but to do that if somebody requests it because it would be so cost prohibitive.

27:52

So that's just an example of how we have handled the CM OS guidance, but but the agencies do that differently too.

28:05

I'm aware.

28:10

Susan yeah, I had another comment that figure I'll just throw in, which is I wonder if we can add up.

28:23

We have a little footnote about what happens in Massachusetts or what is happening with Massachusetts in terms of their remote time meeting participation.

28:32

And there is in, I think it deserves mention maybe another footnote about how they do it in New Hampshire with the SB-2 system that the town meeting being a two-part system.

28:47

They, their Australian ballot system is a A2 part system.

28:53

So it's a, it's basically Jericho reinvented with the, the only system they have for Australian ballot in New Hampshire being a two-part, being a meeting and then a a ballot vote.

29:04

So I'm happy to it.

29:06

It's that, that, that was in the in that 10 pager that I created months ago.

29:13

So I just thought if folks are looking at Jericho as innovative, it would.

29:20

And if any legislator is interested, they should know that the statute actually exists already in in New Hampshire.

29:26

OK, We will make sure that that is called out either in the body of the report.

29:31

Yeah, and or in a footnote as well, Susan.

29:35

Thanks Kate and then Megan, thank you.

29:50

So yeah, this will not be new feedback that you asked, feedback that we think that you should hear.

29:54

I feel like my feedback has not been heard, I guess.

29:57

So I will just say it for good measure for one last time.

30:01

So looking at the report and where I hope the executive summary could possibly say more about this is right now there is there are Vermonters being denied access to local elections and voting.

30:18

That is happening.

30:20

There are no Reg, there are no recommendations to the legislature to fix that.

30:27

So the status quo is there's nothing in this report addressing making that better for those who are being denied local access to elections.

30:37

The second is that in this report, the Secretary of State makes the claim that remote town meeting access is not currently legally allowed even under the ADA.

30:47

There is no citation there.

30:49

And so I think that I would love to see that actually attributed to someone.

30:55

So if that is the Secretary of State's office, please attribute to the Secretary of State's office.

30:59

If you're attributing it to the attorney General's office, please attribute it to the attorney general's office.

31:03

That is not and across the board interpretation of the law and it is someone's interpretation.

31:09

So I'd like to see that included in there.

31:12

I, I don't think that we say it's not allowed that that's the Secretary of State's opinion.

31:18

We say that it is the opinion of the Secretary of State that towns need to accommodate reasonable accommodation requests and should work with their lawyers on how to do so.

31:30

We are not saying so you're not saying that you're not saying that it's this, I'll pull, I'll pull the section and send it.

31:37

It's clear It doesn't actually say it doesn't attribute it to anyone.

31:40

It doesn't attribute to the Secretary of State, which is the problem.

31:43

It I'll pull that section and I'll put it in chat unless I'll share what I am sharing.

31:49

Thank you.

31:49

I'll share it in the chat so you can see what I'm talking about.

31:53

So I want I just want it attributed to someone because right now it just says something along the lines of currently the understanding is such that blah, blah, blah.

32:03

So I'll send it.

32:04

So the rest of what I wanted to say is that I think the Disability Rights Vermont may be in touch about the section that page or so that mentions them and how Vermonters should use them as a resource around local elections 'cause I think some of that maybe is not fully accurate.

32:22

And I think that we would want to include the Vermont Human Rights Commission also in that section, especially around supporting Vermonters to be able to make complaints when they are being denied access.

32:33

So those are the additions or the things that I wanted to make sure we're heard.

32:37

Thank you.

32:39

No problem.

32:39

Kate, I don't think we heard officially from we did talk to Jessica, but we didn't hear officially directly from disability rights or from the Human Rights Commission.

32:52

So Laura and Kate, since you are both representatives of those groups, if you have specific modifications to those sections, please send them.

33:05

We, we do have an addendum, but which is great, Laura, we just haven't seen it.

33:15

So we we haven't, we don't know what your addendum says, but if you have modifications to the section of the report that Kate is referring to, will you please let us know if there are ways that you want disability rights for months roll with regard to folks ability to work with you around local elections.

33:39

We don't have that feedback right now.

33:41

So if you could provide it to us, that would be great.

33:45

Sure.

33:46

Yeah.

33:47

You would prefer that in writing is my understanding.

33:50

Yeah.

33:51

That would be helpful at this at this point.

33:52

Then we can make sure that we're getting it right that way.

33:56

We're not.

33:57

Yeah.

33:58

Thank you.

33:59

And that can be separate from your addendum and it would be helpful to have before the addendum so that we can make that change sooner as opposed to later.

34:13

Jessica.

34:16

And just to be clear, to not, you know, be hiding the ball.

34:19

The addendum is very, very short and just encouraging the opportunity to be able to provide either written or live testimony on the report to be able to raise additional issues.

34:33

And then each different organization that has any issues will have the opportunity to say bring their unique perspective to the table more so we tried to keep it very, very short.

34:46

That will be helpful.

34:48

I can say honestly, and having it be read and absorbed is my knowledge of legislative reports, which is great.

34:55

And I look forward to reading your addendum.

34:59

Megan.

35:09

Megan, I think you're still on mute.

35:13

Am I on mute now?

35:15

You're none.

35:16

OK.

35:18

So I'm not sure that it was clear.

35:22

I think I just in my sense, like this group met, we had a lot of opinions.

35:29

That's clear in terms of the foreign language interpretation and translation.

35:35

I'm just not not sure it's valuable to lead with the fact that we it, it seems more valuable to lead with the things that you did that we did like, like, where are we at with foreign language interpretation, kind of like a bug, you know, where are we at?

35:53

What is the current law?

35:55

What have we done well?

35:57

And what did you hear from folks like here are some various approaches and the pros and cons around that.

36:06

Because if I were reading this from AI just so again, it's a stylistic thing rather than like leaving with the fact that we all had different views, which we seems clear is to lead with what's the current status, what's the current need and the things that you've gleaned, the things that we all gleaned from from our different expertise in this and maybe that maybe we didn't present those.

36:39

But so I, and again, I can send this with my comments to those, to those agree that that is useful at this point.

36:51

That'd be great.

36:52

Thank you, Megan.

36:54

That'd be helpful.

36:55

Also, it mentions that Van's addendum is going to anyway.

37:01

Nothing.

37:04

Yeah.

37:04

If we misstated what would happen in Van's addendum, let us know, Megan.

37:08

We did that based on what we had in front of us.

37:10

So just provide that feedback, Kate.

37:19

Thank you.

37:20

So here is the section that I was referring to.

37:22

Here is the quote.

37:24

Historically and under current legal interpretation, the town meeting statutes have been interpreted as requiring that voters in the community need to be physically present in the meeting to vote in the defined location of the town meeting.

37:38

What I am asking, as is with the rest of the report interpretation by whom?

37:46

State that and cite that because there is not agreement on that.

37:50

And so I think in the report that needs to be cited, there are no page numbers.

37:54

Laura.

37:55

I wish there were.

37:57

Let me see, here it is.

37:59

Oh gosh, somewhere in the middle.

38:05

Yeah, I'll if I can find that and give it an approximate page number, Laura, I will.

38:08

It's under the town meeting portion of it.

38:12

So I, I know that the only documentation I've seen of that is from the Secretary of State's office by will sending that will sending memo.

38:21

And if there are other documentation, other agencies interpreting it the same, it should be included in the report.

38:27

Thank you.

38:29

Yes.

38:39

Muhammad, good morning everyone here.

38:43

I just wanted to stress that the interpretation of languages we're talking about are not just international.

38:53

American Sign Language is American.

38:57

It's not foreign.

38:59

So either we say American Sign Language and foreign languages to be more precise.

39:10

OK, that's good feedback and we can make that.

39:16

I actually don't even love the term foreign language because there's a lot of people who live here who are born here and they are not foreign and they do not speak English as their native tongue.

39:28

So good point.

39:31

I don't love that.

39:32

I don't love that term.

39:34

Good point.

39:35

It's a very othering term.

39:37

Foreign language, let's say.

39:39

Let's say other than English, to make it simple.

39:43

Other than English.

39:45

Yeah, I like that.

39:52

Jessica, I acknowledge your comment.

39:57

I think we tried to provide a balance on that.

40:03

And added quite a bit more citations, but the interpretation piece is more difficult to capture honestly in a group that everyone doesn't agree with the interpretation.

40:16

So I, I think that may be a place that would be a great thing to put in your addendum, your analysis of that.

40:28

So sorry, just to be clear, I was just offering to say here's what here's what the law says.

40:36

Yeah, I think, I think that we are putting that in the report wherever we can and wherever is appropriate.

40:44

And if there's places that you don't think that we've done that adequately, again, please send that to us.

40:49

But the I think, I think we have done our level best at that.

40:56

So if you have feedback, please let us know.

41:08

And Kate, I can, we can make it clear that that is the Secretary of State's current legal analysis.

41:18

And as far as I know, there's not any other agency that has weighed in on that.

41:26

The only thing that I will say and that I, I need this group to know is the Secretary of State is not the determiner of what happens at local elections.

41:34

We're just not.

41:35

We we provide advice and counsel, but we are not the decider.

41:39

And so we're trying to make that clear to everybody and that that is true.

41:46

We don't get to decide local election policy decisions at the local election level.

41:54

Yeah.

41:55

And if that is the Secretary of State's current interpretation, what concerns me then is that there are no recommendations about how to change that.

42:05

So I would hope that my Secretary of State's office would say this is our interpretation.

42:10

And we are concerned because based on our interpretation of the current laws, entire demographics of people cannot vote.

42:18

And we wish the Legislature to change that.

42:21

I don't know.

42:24

Maybe that's just wishful thinking on my part, but that seems like a great opportunity for this report and the Secretary of State's office.

42:32
Susan.

42:40
Kate really articulately points out that when I can't come to a town meeting, it means I can't vote.

42:49
And this is, you know what, this is what we're talking about here.

42:52
And I think that the report does a good job of balancing the quantity quality question that we've been talking about for all these many months.

43:05
And Kate wants to put at the beginning, you know, Vermonters are being denied the vote.

43:11
And I think that that if at any time when we talk about the that that issue, I think we also need to balance it, which you generally do with the fact that town meeting is this extraordinary extraordinarily empowered system.

43:30
And that the people who can participate are way more empowered than places that don't have direct deliberative democracy, the power to amend, the power to really get right in there and be the government.

43:42
And so I hope that that will be, you know, anytime we make changes to how we're describing what we want, we're showing that that balance.

43:52
So that I think a reminder to the legislature that simply switching to Australian ballot loses something and and so there there are trade-offs to be made with every decision.

44:03
So every time we make those points, I think it's great to to frame those trade-offs.

44:09
Just very briefly, but clearly, yes, thank you, Suzanne Mohammed.

44:18
A word came up about four times already.

44:21

It's like people or some people feel folks have been denied to vote.

44:28

I want to post that a little more unless you guys have some other suggestions.

44:34

Often what I notice it may not just be someone was literally denied to vote.

44:42

It could happen yes I agree, but also often time people do not even have information on what is being voted on, where, where to vote on that being voted on.

44:59

Meaning there is a lack of awareness.

45:03

But that's that's how I see it.

45:06

If I am not aware, if I am not informed, then I don't know.

45:12

Hence I won't go vote.

45:14

So that piece is missing in addition to the denial.

45:20

I think that's a good point and we did try to talk about that a little bit, but I think we can emphasize that a little bit more.

45:27

Mohammed, I forget, is it the Jericho model where there's a September meeting where people can come and really talk about the issues and then there's a vote and about what should you know, an empowered select board.

45:43

There's like 3 different phases of decision making process landing ultimately in an Australian ballot.

45:49

But the goal of the community is to really educate everybody along the way and to, and to have to have people help the community work on the things that are most important.

46:03

And I think we can emphasize, I, I think this group agrees that that's a good model to, to build awareness of all the local issues that are, that are relevant, that are on the table that could be voted on so that people get engaged to vote.

46:19

There's probably other ways that that can be done too.

46:23

And there's not.

46:25

It's not probably.

46:26

There are definitely other ways that that can be done too and we should make that a little bit more clear in the report.

46:33

We can do that.

46:35

And another remark about the report.

46:38

I see that we stated what the law is, what does the law States and just like in contrast with the best practice, I have an issue with that.

46:54

Can we word it out by saying the law should actually be based on best practice, not just defining it, if that makes sense.

47:06

I, I don't know that we have consensus on that as a group on all of the issues where that could be done.

47:16

And I don't want to open this report to that extent at this time.

47:21

Mohammed, I'm, I'm sorry, but people can absolutely talk about that in their addendums or when they're asked to testify.

47:28

But that would be a pretty large structural change with some big policy shifts.

47:35

So from where the report is right now, and every one of us could talk about that as our respective groups and our position on that, whether something that the working group agreed as best practice should become a requirement of the law.

47:50

Every single group that's represented here can have a perspective on that and can advocate for that.

47:55

And I recommend that we do.

47:57

But the things that are there that are recommended are the things that we all had consensus on and, and we were not able to get consensus on everything.

48:13

And so I, I don't want to open up the report to that extent at this time.

48:20

Laura, I was wondering, you know, when reading the report where it was saying we had consensus, we didn't have consensus.

48:28

And I understand that you are drawing that a lot from the surveys that you did with everybody.

48:35

But I did we were we ever given access to see what other people's responses were.

48:44

I was surprised at some of the things that were said just simply because I was like, oh, I didn't realize we were that much in disagreement about that particular issue or oh, wow, we had consensus on that.

48:56

I didn't think we had consensus on that.

48:58

And so I guess I was just wondering if those surveys were intended to be secret and not

shared or if or if we could see how the rest of our working group members actually felt about things.

49:14

Because some things I think were only addressed in that survey and not really addressed a lot in conversation sensation in these meetings.

49:23

Because I, I was surprised about some things.

49:28

Well, here's something you all should know.

49:31

We probably should have said that at the very beginning.

49:33

Absolutely nothing that anyone gives us is secret or confidential.

49:36

All of it's a public record.

49:37

I don't have a way.

49:39

So did we proactively share that with everybody?

49:44

I don't remember share it with everybody, but I think Kate had requested it and we sent it.

49:51

Yeah, I think if it was what Kelly just said is that Kate requested.

49:56

Bye Laura, Thank you so much for coming.

49:59

Bye.

50:04

I so if it was requested, we gave it and we certainly can provide it to everybody, but it's not secret.

50:11

And I was asked that with, so we in, in, in writing, there's places where we said consensus or not consensus.

50:21

We went back through the transcripts and the videos of these meetings.

50:25

We had individual meetings with people from which we took notes.

50:28

We took the submissions in writing all throughout this process, including but not exclusive to those surveys.

50:37

So there's a lot of material flowing in that we reviewed to try to make sure that we captured everybody's viewpoints throughout the process.

50:49

So it was not just the surveys that got included in there.

50:52

It was anytime anyone told us anything, we tried to sort of compile it together and look at that, Megan, I just want to echo what Laura said as I read through.

51:11

I'm also like, oh, we're I, I didn't know we were not in alignment around that.

51:17

I did not.

51:18

And I, I just, I want to appreciate one that the, the court helps us to see some of where we agree and disagree.

51:27

And I'm wondering if I'm, I'm hoping that despite what sometimes feels like a rocky process, and I, I understand that you all may feel like you're just being criticized in the report writing this one.

51:43

I appreciate that the report helps to clarify both where we can gain more alignment and that in the writing of the best practices guide, I hope we can be brought together to flush some of those places out like Jericho as that example.

52:04

And I in my notes I make, I make a note that MMCTV, which is van supports Jericho in that work.

52:14

And that that's, you know, another example of this resource that I want to make sure that we are continuing to leverage that it's already existing and is and is mentioned specifically so that the legislature sees that, you know, look, look, we have, we have, we're not coming to you and you have to start from scratch.

52:38

You know, you don't have to, you know, with the grant request around hybrid meeting access, we don't have to start from scratch.

52:47

We have a good foundation to begin to build on, you know, similarly mentioning the disability rights Vermont, the work that they're doing, we don't have to start from scratch and understanding this work, so.

53:05

Frank, thank you.

53:06

Yeah, thank you.

53:07

Megan, a question about the best practices guide.

53:11

Is that something the legislative committee is going to be ironing out or is that something they're going to be stipulating that needs to be ironed out and that will go through rules at some point in time?

53:22

That is something that is not an administrative rule, Frank, So will not go through rules and it's not a statutory process.

53:29

So it will not be in front of a legislative committee unless they ask us to testify about it.

53:36

But it will be something that this group creates, hopefully with consensus and and progress and then will be posted on the Secretary of State's page.

53:46

I'd love it for it to be posted widely, not just on the Secretary of State's page, but on multiple of our stakeholders group.

53:56

So it would be be another phase post legislative decision on the actual changes to the statute by itself and then we would be filling in afterwards with the best practices guide.

54:07

No, we're going to work on the best practices guide in January and February, OK.

54:13

And that is well ahead of any legislative changes.

54:16

If there are legislative changes, then we will have to make modifications, but hopefully the legislation lends, the legislative changes will be clear and we will remove what was previously best practice that is now the requirement of the law into the law.

54:32

Yeah, thank you.

54:33

Yeah, Jessica, I'll leave it to the folks at League of Cities and Towns and Susan to tell me if you think this is a silly idea.

54:45

Have you thought at all about upon releasing the best practices guide, maybe hosting A webinar to, you know, give people sort of like an overview of what's in here and, you know, just raise awareness about its existence.

55:04

And Susan and Ted, please do say something.

55:06

If you think that's stupid, then I don't think it's stupid at all.

55:11

I think it's a great idea.

55:12

I'm, I'm, I'm, I don't, I'm not on the, on the staff at the LCT, so I, I can't commit their resources, but they do do a lot of trainings and interface with public officials.

55:25

I mean, all the time.

55:27

And referencing the best practice guide makes a ton of sense to me.

55:35

I agree.

55:42

And we will, I can commit to as a Secretary of State promoting it within our circles as well, which is the town clerk's.

55:49

So, you know, primarily we have other circles as well.

55:52

Obviously, we'll put it on our website and all of those things, but we will proactively send it to all the town clerks and work with the league to figure out who's who's attending the trainings and who's best to provide the trainings.

56:09

Frank, can the law be dated such that it takes effect so that some of this training can come ahead of the on it to look?

56:18

Because we've had that problem before where the law effective date dropped and there was no education.

56:24

It was a lot of confusion.

56:26

So I'm wondering if there's there's a lot of ways to do legislative work.

56:30

One of them is to require training, have different effective dates within the law.

56:37

So if there was a bill that changed something and it needed to be done across the entire state, there could be an effective date of May of 2027, which is wild.

56:55

And there could be a training requirement that goes into effect July 1st, and everyone needs to receive the training before the change goes into effect in May of 27.

57:07

There's a lot of ways to draft legislation to make sure that everyone is trained on it before it goes into effect.

57:15

Of course, a lot of times the law just goes into effect and then people need to scramble to figure out what the law means and how to interpret it and how to comply with it.

57:26

That happens all the time, too.

57:28

So it really is in the legislative drafting and the intent of the legislature on how they want something that is being changed to roll out.

57:38

And sometimes they don't think about all those ramifications as well.

57:41

And I would say this, I'm going to say it very publicly.

57:45

Sometimes the impacts of a legislative change are bigger than anyone who's sitting in the chair or who is making the law understands.

57:56

And you don't understand it until you have to implement it because there's a lot of details that just don't get ironed out in statutory language.

58:07

It's almost impossible to get every detail in statutory language, which is why we have administrative rule making and people interpreting the law.

58:22

Jessica, that's me forgetting to put my hand down.

58:28

Sorry.

58:29

That's OK.

58:32

That's totally OK.

58:36

All right.

58:40

Any other things that we should talk about as a group, Frank?

58:48

And I can fully understand the IT platforms and the technology not being specified.

58:56

Yeah, because there's a ton of discussion around that.

59:00

Yes, it certainly would be at the committee level.

59:04

Or would that be best practices do you think?

59:08

Well, I, I think there's a couple of ways that that could be addressed.

59:14

1 of it would be best practices.

59:16

There is also the suggestion, I'm not sure I would have to go back and reread it, whether it raises to the level of a of a firm recommendation, but the the Legislature think about a statewide contract or statewide committee that is responsible for assessing platforms.

59:34

That really is the, I think the better way to handle the platform issue because as we've talked about a lot, the platforms are changing all the time.

59:44

So there needs to be, if we want to get to a place where there's consistency of IT, platforms across state and local government, state government is very consistent.

59:53

We're just all on the ADS platform and ADS can make a change and we are all, we're all with it like that's what we have to do.

1:00:04

And but if there's going to be standardization?

1:00:10

Within across state government, I mean local government rather there could be a statewide contract, there could be a statewide group that assesses technology.

1:00:21

There's a couple of different ways and that all is discussed in the report.

1:00:24

But and we can talk about that in best practices some, but to my knowledge right now there's no statewide requirement on any municipality or local government to use a particular platform or particular set of requirements outside of hybrid.

1:00:44

I can see where that, where that means something in the timing of it is one thing because it's more of a fine-tuned comb process resulting in this type of subcommittee or group that would be doing that for the because I don't know if the committee members of the legislature are going to really grasp a lot.

1:01:05

They will not have the time or capability to grasp and make decisions at that level, nor arguably should they because the technology will change.

1:01:14

That's right.

1:01:14

But they could identify and create a subgroup responsible for that work.

1:01:18

Yeah, on an ongoing basis.

1:01:21

Yeah, Jessica, I did.

1:01:27

I did mean to raise my hand this time.

1:01:29

So I think one of the, you know, sort of comments questions that I had put in some of my feedback was that was my understanding there for the state.

1:01:37

There are certain statewide contracts, right.

1:01:39

So you get a reduced rate for interpretations etcetera.

1:01:43

And I know that when I look at the oh goodness, what is this office buildings and General Services, There are some I just don't know there.

1:01:57

There's a section on all towns, schools and political subdivisions contracts.

1:02:03

I wasn't so so you're saying, yes, those are those are statewide contracts that are available to municipalities to part, to partaken.

1:02:14

They're not required to use them, but they can and the state negotiates a rate that can be cheaper or can be more expensive depending on the service.

1:02:26

It's not always a cost savings, but I think most of the time that is the municipalities can use those contracts without having to go out separately to bid.

1:02:38

OK.

1:02:38

So there could be the possibility of things like interpretation services or tech things where it's not mandatory, but like this is an optional thing that's been negotiated that could potentially save money.

1:02:52

Yes.

1:02:53

And there's ones that are currently state contracts that could be made open to municipalities.

1:02:58

There's there are, there's the option of it being mandated and it's required to use that statewide contract.

1:03:06

There's a wide variety of options there that could be used from a contracting level that the Legislature would need to, especially if they were saying you have to use this provider.

1:03:20

That would have to be a legislative policy choice.

1:03:25

But, and I don't know, you know, I don't, I've never, I don't work for buildings and grounds.

1:03:31

I've never have worked for buildings and grounds.

1:03:33

I don't know what their policy is on which of their contracts they specifically negotiate to be available to municipalities, which they don't.

1:03:44

Ted, I don't know if the league has a perspective on that if you talk to buildings and grounds about contracts that you want to be on available to the municipalities as well.

1:03:58

No, Typically it's a decision BGS makes based on the competitiveness of the the process.

1:04:06

Sometimes they find that it doesn't appeal to the vendors to be able to sell to towns for some reason.

1:04:15

I don't, I don't know exactly what that calculus looks like, but it's, it's kind of hit or miss.

1:04:20

Some are, some are, I'm sure a conversation with BGS to say, hey, we'd like these to be available might, might open it up wider.

1:04:27

I think the big* to all of this is it doesn't necessarily save any money.

1:04:31

It's it's, it's funny, the state doesn't get the best deal and often times it's advantageous to the town to do their own procurement in the process.

1:04:42

But that I want to be clear, I think it's a great idea to try to leverage it and see if it works.

1:04:49

Thanks, Ted.

1:04:50

Yeah, we, we have them.

1:04:52

There's quite a few that are available to municipalities, but I whether that list should be expanded, I don't know.

1:05:06

Frank, some of this might be outside of the usual lane of building the grounds.

1:05:14

And I found this out with some other stuff, with some energy, things that they were pawned off on by the legislature and they had to scramble to put it together.

1:05:22

And they had a little room up in the attic that they put staff into.

1:05:27

And so I think that that might be taken under consideration with is with the familiarity of it, you know, of this type of thing.

1:05:37

Yeah.

1:05:38

I mean, yeah, yeah.

1:05:40

They have contracts on all sorts of things, like an insane, insane diversity of topics from like the mix of concrete that goes on our roads to, you know, trucks, trucks to, I mean, it's just everything.

1:06:03

So they don't have to have specific knowledge to have the contract available, but and they have negotiation teams that are really considering the diversity of what they're responsible for.

1:06:17

Pretty amazing.

1:06:18

But yeah, it's just, yeah, I think as Ted said it what they allowed to be extended to municipalities.

1:06:26

I'm not clear what their analysis is of that and I don't know their decision making process of, of what they choose to do make not just within the state network, but available to locals as well.

1:06:46

And I think I'll go back through, but I'm hearing that we have a consensus, I'll say use that word, but I think we have a consensus that if there is a possibility for statewide contracts on IT or language or web, it should be strongly considered and, and recommended or required of BGS.

1:07:13

And I, we can make that a little bit stronger, if that makes sense.

1:07:17

But I have, I don't have the language in front of me because my computer just died.

1:07:20

But the we can, we can make sure that that is there and certainly can be called out in the executive summary as well.

1:07:39

Jessica.

1:07:45

All right, OK.

1:07:51

Recognizing that we have 15 more minutes together, I want to make sure that I'm hearing everybody to the extent that I can and.

1:08:06

Oh yeah, yeah, Jessica just pointed out the web accessibility.

1:08:10

I mean, there definitely are on the state level and the state has a coordinated effort to try and make all of our websites accessible and our documents accessible.

1:08:21

Ted, I don't know, Are you able to talk about what the league is doing to help municipalities with the accessibility guidelines?

1:08:32

Yeah, I, we've had a webinar on it and we've published several news items and journal items.

1:08:39

We don't have any specific technical assistance that's actually getting out to the municipality and saying that you're here's how you do it and holding their hand through the process.

1:08:47

But we are trying to train the trainer through multiple, multiple means.

1:08:57

It's definitely being talked about in all the spaces I've seen, and for the most part, I think people are feeling, well, at least I can speak for us.

1:09:10

I feel like we're feeling like what felt overwhelming or unclear is becoming a lot more clear and doable.

1:09:19

And so that is great and we have a a solid plan to move forward and I feel very happy with that.

1:09:28

If you had asked me what our plan was or how we were going to accomplish it in April of this year, I would have had a different response.

1:09:34

But luckily time and planning and more information is very useful.

1:09:40

So my understanding is, but I don't think it was out, but laid out here is that it probably would be a recommendation, maybe not maybe to pull any criminal penalties for non compliance and, and, and, and encourage educational directions instead of having people all of a sudden who are new, you know, not really new people on the job at the town levels and different things who aren't really trained up find themselves where they're committing of an offense for for the the web accessibility requirements.

1:10:25

That's not a state law, that's a federal law.

1:10:27

So we don't have any ability to modify that.

1:10:30

That would be yeah.

1:10:32

So the ADA thing would be a big umbrella on that whole thing.

1:10:39

Well, it is the, the ADA is the infrastructure under which that web accessibility requirements are.

1:10:47

And we as the state did not participate.

1:10:51

I mean, maybe the state did, but we don't control the impacts of failure to follow the law the, the way that the law is written or the impacts of it.

1:11:01

But I'm, I'm, I mean, I, I don't know.

1:11:05

I, I don't, I was about to say I'm confident, but I don't think that I can say I'm confident about what the federal government will do at this time and about anything.

1:11:13

But I'm usually, you know, the, all of the factors are considered and, and that's taken into account on whether or not there are criminal liabilities.

1:11:26

You know, there's like a, the willful disregard versus, you know, not doing it, but I don't know what the analysis will be.

1:11:34

And I certainly think that everyone should really try to make an effort to become fully compliant.

1:11:39

That should be everybody's primary goal.

1:11:41

And I, I think that is being being communicated through a variety of channels.

1:11:48

So that's a really big elephant in the room because you're looking at violation of federal statute.

1:11:54

Yeah.

1:11:54

I mean, and I don't think anybody wants to violate the law.

1:11:57

No.

1:11:57

And I, I think at a base level, we all want to make sure that we are providing access.

1:12:05

And we have been told how we have not been doing it and how we can do it better.

1:12:09

And we should be doing that.

1:12:12

And that covers a lot of the discussion we've had here really this morning.

1:12:16

Well, this just covers web accessibility.

1:12:18

Yeah.

1:12:19

Yeah.

1:12:19

But the ADA is a bigger umbrella than just that.

1:12:24

Well, I don't want to conflate the two conversations.

1:12:26

The the web accessibility is, I don't want even really want to say it's a new requirement.

1:12:32

It is a requirement that is becoming implemented that we all need to comply with.

1:12:37

And that is something that I think everybody who has a website, who's the state or local is making efforts to modify, I hope.

1:12:51

But again, I only do my little sphere.

1:12:56

So we're, we, I can say the Secretary of State, we are working very hard to meet those requirements wherever we can and, and as fast as we can.

1:13:05

And in fact, we have made immediate changes to how we're creating documents now, Laura.

1:13:17

I, I, I want to say like I, I do recognize the areas in which you, the report it, you know, has taken into consideration some of the concerns that have been brought up, I know, by Jessica and myself in our last meeting.

1:13:38

And, and so I, I do appreciate that.

1:13:45

I, I, but I do also want to acknowledge that there are still parts of this report that come from a very ableist perspective and in some ways that, you know, so this goes out and we, and then we have to combat the ableism that it perpetuates.

1:14:08

So, you know, I just, I just want to acknowledge that to everybody and for everyone who has really been pushing, you know, specifically for the rights of disabled people in this process and the ways in which they've been disenfranchised.

1:14:29

We, you know, we, we want accessibility, you know, the universal accessibility to really, you know, stop forcing folks with, with disabilities to out themselves, to have to, to have to identify, to have to signal to the community and, and their, and I, and I think that the

report still creates a scenario, many scenarios for people with disabilities where they have to be identified as people with disabilities before they can participate.

1:15:14

So I just wanted to say that.

1:15:16

And although I know we're, we're going to, you know, I'll put in our addendums, I do recognize the ways in which you have really tried to balance some of what's come your way from people, But I don't, I haven't heard a lot of people pushing back against there being a universal accessibility.

1:15:40

And so part of my confusion, I guess, is that I, although I know that people have been hung up on things like security and, and, and all kinds of stuff and, and tradition and, and all that.

1:15:54

I, I haven't heard people in this, in this working group say we don't, you know, we still think that people with disabilities should have to, you know, hand up and do do make, make special requests and have to ask for accommodations.

1:16:12

And but, but that's my read on what's being presented is that that that is yeah, what we're saying.

1:16:22

And, and I don't, and I don't think that this working group has been saying that.

1:16:26

So sorry if I'm not articulating my thoughts very well.

1:16:32

But I, you know, I just, I feel like I haven't, I've heard more support for us making it universally accessible for everybody.

1:16:46

And yet some things in this report still make folks with disabilities have to, you know, self identify and and and be treated inequitably.

1:17:00

So that's, I just wanted to say that if we're talking about universal accessibility with regard to local annual meeting, that has a very mixed, mixed response.

1:17:20

And it is not the recommendation universally of this group to have universal design with regard to local annual meeting.

1:17:30

And and that may be well, more well reflected in the surveys that I haven't had a look at.

1:17:35

But I, I appreciate that you're, you know, that you had to have that balance and make make, but I, but also feel like I haven't heard, really, really heard that in this process.

1:17:47

So thank you though.

1:17:49

I, I understand you're, you, you know, you're in a tough position.

1:17:55

And I, Kate, I really disagree with your statement there that some disabled people are not allowed to vote under the current law.

1:18:05

What we are saying is that towns need to use the ADA process to accommodate people to vote.

1:18:15

And I also have not heard anyone say that disabled people should not be allowed to vote, that that is.

1:18:20

And I understand that that's not the standard of universal access that that Laura's talking about.

1:18:29

I understand that that's not the goal of universal access to annual meeting is universal design that that is true.

1:18:38

That's not the position of the Secretary of State.

1:18:41

But it is also true that the Secretary of State believes that disabled people should be allowed to vote in state and local elections and that towns need to ensure that they're using the ADA process to accommodate that.

1:18:56

And but again, we are not the deciders of local election issues.

1:19:03

We simply are not.

1:19:04

But that is what we are.

1:19:05

But you are the authors of this report.

1:19:08

You are the authors of this report going to the legislature.

1:19:10

And you know there are disabled people throughout the state who have not been allowed to vote for decades.

1:19:18

So, and you are the author of this report and you know that people currently cannot vote.

1:19:23

And you know that your policy memos are being weaponized to keep people from voting.

1:19:28

And we are actively revising our policy on that Kate.

1:19:33

And we are actively saying exactly what I just said in this report.

1:19:37

And I and I understand that that is not universal design and we can, we can call that out more Laura, as a desire of some to have universal design around local annual meeting, but that is not the consensus of this group.

1:19:54

And, and I, I really think you should put that in your addendum.

1:20:00

I really do.

1:20:00

And, and the legislature will have to decide that that is a legislative decision, not this group's decision and not our office as the author of this report.

1:20:10

Although I really think we all at this point can take some ownership over this report.

1:20:16

We really have tried our best to hear everyone's feedback, to absorb everyone's feedback.

1:20:22

I would not say that this is the Secretary of State's report.

1:20:25

I would say this is the ACT 133 report.

1:20:29

So I but Laura, I'm happy to look at everywhere we talk about universal design or where we do not talk about universal design.

1:20:41

I'm happy to do that, Mohammed.

1:20:46

Thank you.

1:20:47

Hey, I want to just go back to Laura Cashman and I appreciate your statement around people having to identify themselves as people with disabilities.

1:20:58

There is a problem with that.

1:21:01

Although the intent to be all understand, we are trying to ensure they are all accommodated.

1:21:09

How can we ensure accommodation can be done in a private way?

1:21:15

Let's say in schools, for example, when there is a test to be administered for students,

some students have accommodation based on their IEPs, individual student Learning plans, IEP.

1:21:33

So let's say on a ballot, maybe there would be a box somewhere underneath or maybe even it's a document that the individual will get to check boxes on the accommodation they need without actually having to be there at the front door.

1:21:51

And people are standing by and you have to talk about your disabilities.

1:21:55

We all do know most of disabilities are actually invisible.

1:22:02

You may see someone, even us sitting here right now.

1:22:07

We all may have some disability of some sort, but if I don't name it, you won't know it.

1:22:12

To that extent.

1:22:15

There need to be some privacy and that privacy can be just really on a piece of paper.

1:22:20

Check the box.

1:22:22

Just a suggestion or photo start.

1:22:24

And again, thank you, Laura, because some people don't want to even talk about their disabilities.

1:22:31

Thank you, Laura.

1:22:38

Sorry, I feel like I have to defend Kate's position here because you just said in response that, you know, people aren't being denied the right to vote.

1:22:51

And I, and I don't know if you meant to say that, but I didn't, I didn't mean to say that.

1:22:55

I, what I meant to say is we don't want people to be denied a vote.

1:22:59

And, but I, I'm not saying that people have not been able to vote.

1:23:03

I don't have any.

1:23:05

I mean, I've heard Kate tell me that and I trust her and I believe her and, but I, and I don't want that to be happening.

1:23:16

And but I also know that we do not have universal, we do not have consensus on universal design of being all remote for annual meeting.

1:23:28

And this report cannot say that.

1:23:31

I, I, I hear that, but also like I really want you to hear her when she says that she has been denied the right to vote and they are using your memo as their justification for denying her the right to vote.

1:23:56

You have to hear that I you are defending this position while she is having her rights denied to her and that is not OK.

1:24:11

You are expressing 0 empathy for her and 0 understanding of the fact that the things that you get to do as an able bodied person or I get to do as an able bodied person or a person whose disabilities don't interfere with our ability to participate in the process.

1:24:30

As it is right now, you are not hearing her.

1:24:36

And no wonder she's getting so frustrated.

1:24:39

And I don't like this feeling that like she's one person in this room who we are talking about.

1:24:48

And and you know, I understand you're in a difficult position, but please, your defensive response just completely negated her experience as a person who just couldn't vote in the Select Board meeting.

1:25:05

So, Laura, I just want to say I was not trying to be defensive and I do sincerely apologize for if that's the way it came off.

1:25:16

I just want to be clear, we do not want people who are disabled to be disenfranchised and we do not want our guidance to be weaponized.

1:25:28

And what we are actively doing is providing that guidance that I just stated, which is to use the ADA process to ensure that people can vote and to seek legal counsel about how to do that.

1:25:44

And the guidance with the the so-called memo is a response to an e-mail that happened to our office, not specific to people who are disabled or ADA access, but around transitioning annual meeting during the beginning of COVID to remote.

1:26:04

And then the e-mail response was not an official memo or position statement.

1:26:09

I understand how it's being used, but just just to be clear, it's not like a policy position of the Secretary of State.

1:26:18

It is an e-mail response to a question about can we transition our annual meeting to remote?

1:26:26

And the answer based on the law and the Secretary of State's understanding of the law is no.

1:26:34

But that is a different question than should remote access be granted to someone who has a disability?

1:26:42

Those are two separate questions and we are navigating this.

1:26:48

If the Legislature wants to change the law and make more universal design, then what we are saying is we are happy to work with the legislature on that.

1:27:03

There's going to be several areas of the law that need to be modified.

1:27:07

We're happy to create guidance for towns on that in conjunction with the league.

1:27:12

But I, Kate, I really, I'm really do hear you.

1:27:18

I feel like, I really want to say I've been trying to hear you.

1:27:22

I don't want to deny how frustrated you are on this.

1:27:27

And you know, I think this is an area that needs to continue to be talked about.

1:27:32

And unfortunately, I have need to be in another meeting because it is 10 O 5.

1:27:38

And this is a hard note to end on, but this is the note that we're ending on today.

1:27:43

And I'm sorry about that.

1:27:46

And please do provide feedback, Laura, specifically if there's areas where we can be more better about ableist language.

1:27:54

I, I, we have, we met with Jessica, we heard from Laura, we did make several modifications, but if there's more that we can do, let us know and we will go forward.

1:28:10

I do.

1:28:11

I just want to say I do think this is an appropriate place for us to end this meeting because this is the reality of where we are right now.

1:28:20

And if our report doesn't have any impacts to change this reality, then we have failed as a group.

1:28:29

That's just my opinion.

1:28:31

But this is the reality.

1:28:33

Yet we've just spent all these months doing this.

1:28:36

But just, you know, a couple weeks ago, one of our own working group members was denied the right to vote.

1:28:44

So I, I, I don't think that it's inappropriate for us to end here because I think that that highlights exactly why we're doing this work.

1:28:52

So thank you everybody for all of your participation.

1:28:58

Yeah, thank you, Laura, for your participation and everybody for your participation.

1:29:02

I mean, I'm hopeful that this exfoliates the issues better so that we can make it a step forward.

1:29:09

And again, I, I always try and look at things from a positive way.

1:29:18

I think there's things that this is moving us towards conversations that we're all better prepared to have.

1:29:24

So I, is there a way to think of this as a failed effort?

1:29:28
Absolutely.

1:29:29
I don't think this has been a failed effort because I think we've all been participating in a conversation together and, and have made some progress and identified where we need to make more progress.

1:29:41
So I guess I'm, I, I think as somebody who has done a remote town meeting participation for 12 years here in Middlesex, and as frustrated as I am with the lack of moving the ball down the field that, that, that, that we're talking about here, I think it Tees up the ball to be, I don't know how many sports metaphors I can use, but I think that this report does move us closer.

1:30:07
It didn't move us as close as I had hoped.

1:30:15
Megan, we were due with this report the 1st of November.

1:30:19
We're late.

1:30:21
And so I, and if we want the legislature to meaningfully engage with it, we need to, we need to give it so that that is the urgency for there's a bill deadline that's already passed for member bills.

1:30:39
There's a committee bill deadline.

1:30:42
So if, if we're going to have bills move, then they need to have it so they can see what we're saying.

1:30:51
So that's the urgency, Frank, what are the chances that the committee members will change from last session to this session would be dealing with this?

1:31:03
Because there's a so on the House side, I'm not aware of any changes on the Senate side.

1:31:11

One of the Senate members on government operations resigned.

1:31:16

So I'm confident there will be another senator assigned to that.

1:31:20

But the interesting thing is this group was created by a different legislative body.

1:31:26

So the committee members are different currently than were the ones that created the Act 133 working group, but they've been chewing on over meeting law before this previously last year, even the amendments that came through came out of there.

1:31:42

Right.

1:31:42

Yeah.

1:31:44

How much?

1:31:45

Yes.

1:31:53

OK.

1:31:54

Thank you all very much.

1:31:57

Oh, sorry, one quick.

1:31:59

So you're going to send out maybe an e-mail with.

1:32:02

Here are all the deadlines for things.

1:32:05

And here's when we anticipate bringing everybody together to review the accessibility guide.

1:32:10

Yeah, Yes, that was a clear ask by Megan.

1:32:15

That was a clear ask by Megan, and we will make that.

1:32:17

So thank you.

1:32:19

Yeah, thank you.

1:32:22

Thank you all.

1:32:23

Happy holidays to everyone.

1:32:25

Happy Hanukkah and happy the remaining holidays, but happy Hanukkah right now.

1:32:30

So thank you.

1:32:32

Same to you, whoever put us together.

1:32:37

Congratulations.

1:32:39

It was a lot to boil down.

1:32:43

Yes, All right.