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BAZELON CENTER FOR MENTAL HEALTH LAW URGES PEOPLE WITH MENTAL DISABILITIES TO REGISTER TO VOTE FOR MIDTERM ELECTIONS

***With Voter Registration Still Open in Many States,
Bazelon Highlights Voter Rights for People with Mental Disabilities***

Washington, D.C (Oct. 11, 2018)—The Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, a national legal advocacy organization advancing the rights of people with mental disabilities, is urging people with mental disabilities to register to vote in time for midterm elections on November 6, 2018. The registration deadline has passed in some states, but in many states you can still register to vote*.

“People with mental disabilities represent millions of the U.S. population and their voices should be heard, especially for this year’s midterm elections,” said Jennifer Mathis, Director of Policy and Legal Advocacy for the Bazelon Center. “We also want to remind the public that people with mental disabilities have the same right to vote as others and should have the opportunity to exercise this right. Volunteers at voting precincts, poll watchers, passers-by, employers, caregivers and government officials should not assume that a person with mental disabilities is ineligible to cast a vote.”

The Bazelon Center’s advocacy has resulted in a number of states updating their voting laws to be consistent with federal law and ensure that if a person with a mental disability can make a choice, that person can vote. Maine and New Mexico changed their laws to reflect this policy, following similar changes in California, Maryland and Nevada.

Mathis offers important tips for people with mental disabilities and their advocates on what to know when you register and go to the polls to vote:

- People with mental disabilities have the right to register to vote and cast their vote, just like every other United States citizen. People with mental disabilities registering to vote must meet their state’s requirements for all voters – but have the right to reasonable accommodations if they need them.
- If a state has competence requirements for voters, those requirements must be applied to ALL voters and not single out people with disabilities or people under guardianship.
- Generally, only a court can take away a person’s right to vote.
- If an individual’s right to vote is challenged at the polling station, the voter has the right to (and must be given) a provisional ballot.
- People with mental disabilities CAN receive help to register and vote, by a helper of the person’s choice.

- If you are a person with mental disabilities or an advocate who needs additional support or resources, contact the “Protection and Advocacy” office in your state. Visit the National Disability Rights Network at www.ndrn.org to find your state’s “Protection and Advocacy” office.

In time for this critical midterm election, the Bazelon Center has issued a revised edition of its guide to the voting rights of people with mental disabilities, “[VOTE. It's Your Right. Guide to the Voting Rights of People with Mental Disabilities.](#)” The guide, compiled jointly with the National Disability Rights Network, the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, and the law firm of Schulte, Roth & Zabel, lists key legal principles and focuses on four areas of concern: 1) voter-competence requirements, 2) state photo-ID laws, 3) voter challenges and 4) providing help to voters with disabilities. The guide also includes an updated chart listing each state's laws affecting the voting rights of people with mental disabilities.

“VOTE. It's Your Right.” is available as a free PDF to download from the Bazelon Center's website, at: [VOTE. It's Your Right. Guide to the Voting Rights of People with Mental Disabilities.](#) To obtain print copies, please email pubs@bazelon.org.

About The Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

The Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law is a national legal advocacy organization protecting and advancing the rights of people with mental disabilities. The Center promotes laws and policies that enable people with mental disabilities to live independently in their own homes and communities, and to enjoy the same opportunities that everyone else does, including in voting. For more information, visit www.bazelon.org.

*Upcoming Voter Registration Deadlines can be found at: <https://www.usvotefoundation.org/vote/state-elections/state-election-dates-deadlines.htm#AK>

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