

June 11, 2021

Mayor and Council
City of Burnaby
949 Canada Way
Burnaby BC, V5G 1M2

VIA EMAIL

His Worship Mayor Hurley and Council:

DABC is a provincial, cross-disability organization advocating for the rights of people with disabilities. Our mission is to support people, with all disabilities, to live with dignity, independence, and as equal and full participants in the community. We are writing to you today to express our opposition against the City of Burnaby's decision to not offer mail-in voting in the upcoming by-election (June 26, 2021). The exclusion of a mail-in voting option will most certainly create barriers for many Burnaby residents, including people with disabilities, who may not be able to travel to a polling station to cast their vote. The City's failure to offer mail-in ballots actively discriminates against people with disabilities by reducing access to their right to vote. Accommodations must be made for people with disabilities, especially by any level of government, to ensure full access and participation in the voting process.

DABC acknowledges that the City of Burnaby will offer "curbside" voting, which will accommodate individuals to cast their vote in their vehicle within the parking lot of a polling station in the presence of an election official. However, this does not fully accommodate all people with disabilities as some may not have access to a vehicle. As a result, some Burnaby residents will have no means to vote in the upcoming By-Election.

This failure to accommodate is further exacerbated by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, in which some individuals with immune-compromising conditions will be discouraged from voting if their only option is in-person. DABC has also learned that due to Covid-19, there will also be no voting assistance at long term care facilities to support residents' ability to vote in the upcoming by-election.

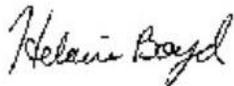
DABC is aware of a City Council meeting which took place on February 8, 2021, in which a report was presented to City Council on the feasibility of mail-in voting. This report recommended that the City postpone implementation until the 2022 general election. The conclusion of this report states that the "establishment of mail ballot voting entails significant changes and additions to the City's local election processes, would need to be done over a short period, and would require substantial additional resources. As a result,

it is recommended that Council postpone potential implementation of mail ballot voting until the 2022 general local election.”¹

Mail in voting is not a new process. Elections BC has used mail-in ballots regularly since 2002 and Elections Canada since 1993. Decades later, municipal elections have not yet caught up, despite there being a considerable amount of research and advocacy conducted on the need for barrier-free access to voting. It is embarrassing that in 2021, when the systems and structures in place to carry out mailing-in voting are readily available - and especially in light of the Covid-19 pandemic in which people with disabilities have experienced further barriers to accessibility and inclusion out of concern for their health - that a municipal government cannot provide a mail-in voting option to its residents.

We call upon the City of Burnaby to implement mail-in voting for all future elections. While we can appreciate that setting up mail-in voting for the upcoming by-election by this point would not be logistically possible, we firstly state that this should have been implemented long before this point, and that in order to meet their human rights obligations in relation to accommodations for people with disabilities, we recommend that the City hire additional election workers during this by-election to assist people with disabilities who are unable to visit any polling station by bringing ballot boxes to them at their place of residence.

Sincerely,



Sincerely,
Helaine Boyd
Executive Director, Programs and Policy
Disability Alliance BC



Andrew Robb
Staff Lawyer
Disability Alliance BC

¹ City of Burnaby City Council Meeting – February 8, 2021: <https://pub-burnaby.escribemeetings.com/Meeting.aspx?Id=02568467-d245-4662-bb01-e3a45ce385b0&Agenda=Agenda&lang=English&Item=68&Tab=attachments>