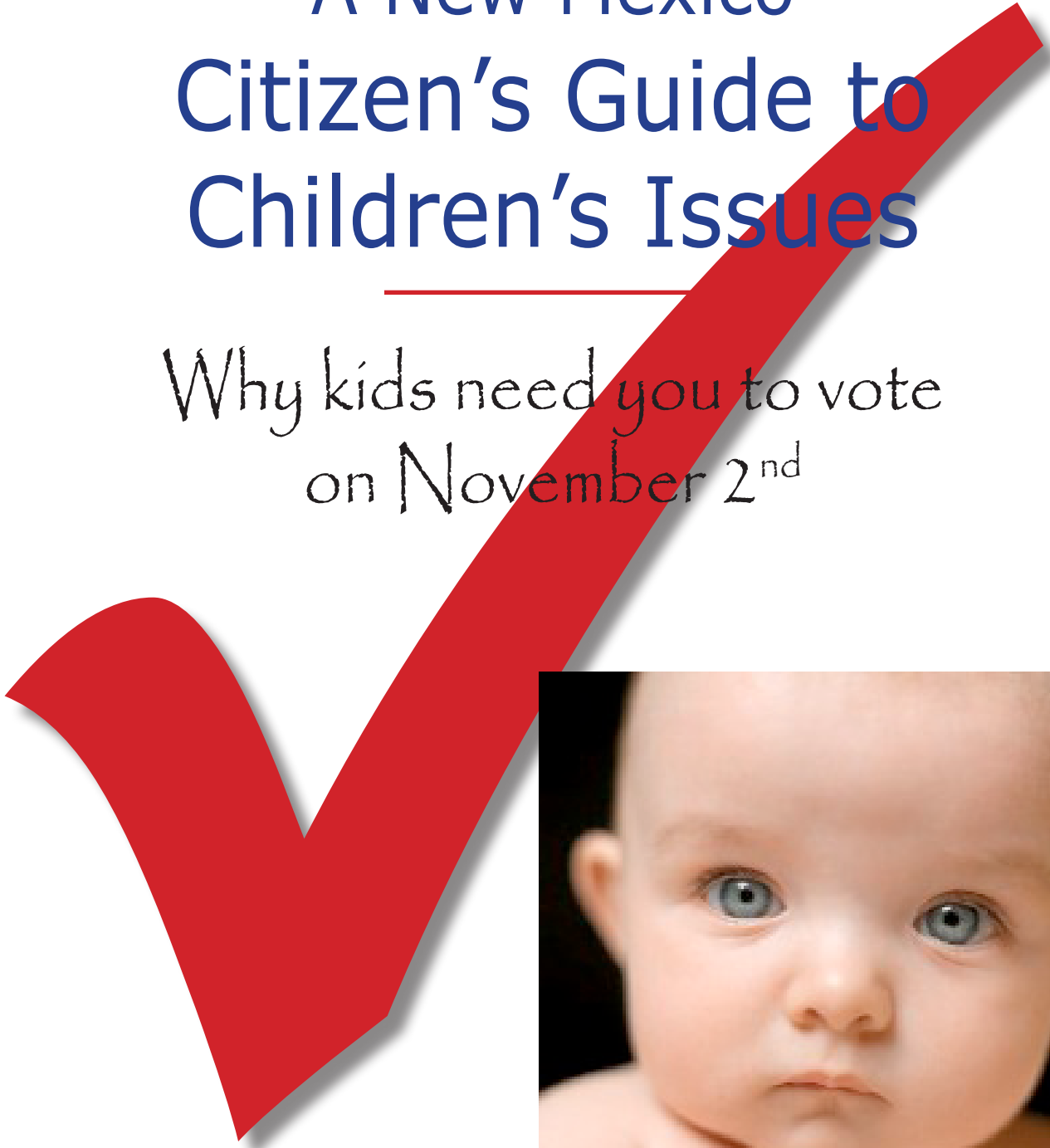


A New Mexico Citizen's Guide to Children's Issues

Why kids need you to vote
on November 2nd



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Updated 2010

Why Children's Issues?

It's all about family values – and valuing families.

A society that values its families also values its children. In our society, there has been a lot of talk about “family values,” but, even during the current election season, there's been very little talk about children. One way to value families and children is to make sure every child can see a doctor. Another is to make high quality childcare affordable so parents can work and children get the preparation they need to start school.

Families are valued when parents earn a decent wage for their full-time work—a wage that allows them to support their families with dignity. Families are valued when parents can take time off of work to care for a sick child without the fear of losing wages or losing their jobs. Families are valued when the cycle of poverty-to-prison is broken instead of supported.

We can tell if families and children are a high priority by looking at how a government collects and spends its peoples' money. Unfortunately, when looking at the public policies of the last four decades, it's clear that Amer-

ican children have become a lower a priority while the wealthy and powerful few have become a bigger priority.

Too many of our public policies have actually hurt American families. Policies such as trade agreements that ship good American jobs overseas. Tax policies that allow profitable corporations to skip out on paying their fair share. Spending policies that shrink programs that serve our most vulnerable population—our children.



Children can't vote, so we must vote on their behalf. Then we must hold our elected officials accountable for doing what's best for kids.

Federal spending on children's programs fell from 20 percent to 15 percent between 1960 and 2005.

Every Child Left Further Behind

Our children are our future, but we're investing fewer resources in them and their future success.

Almost every year since the 1960s the share of federal spending on children's programs has become a smaller and smaller slice of the budget pie.¹

This includes programs like education, nutrition, and health care—all of them essential if our children are to grow up healthy and reach their potential.

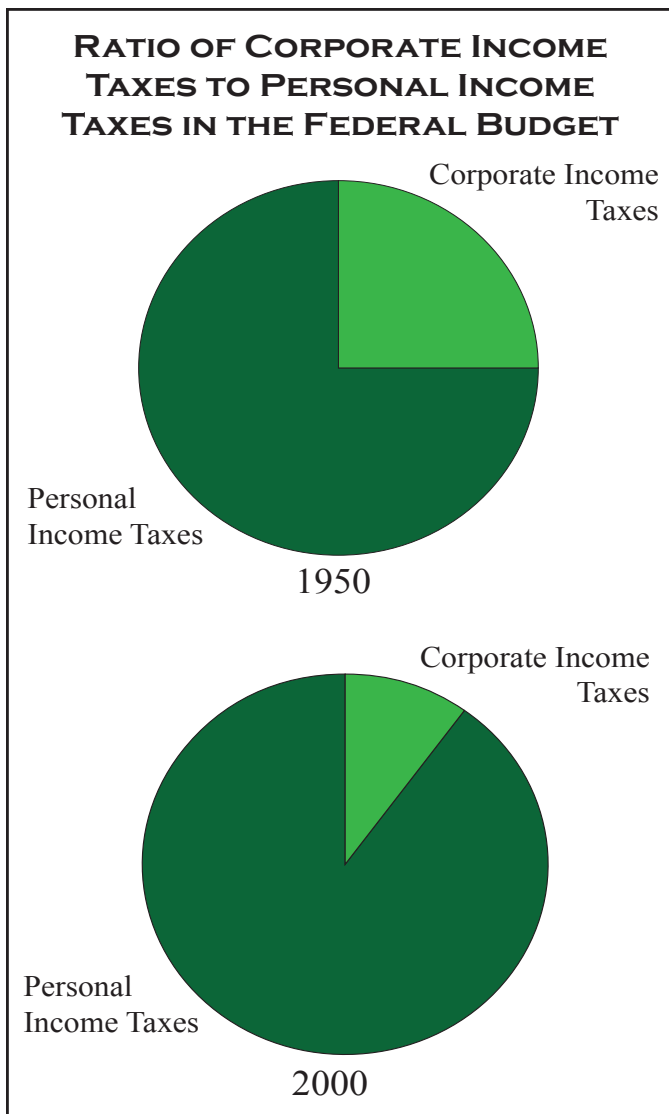
Education makes up just 2 percent of the federal budget.² And that's *all* education—from preschool to graduate school. As our investments in children fall, so do our kids' test scores and high school graduation rates. This makes our country less and less competitive in the global market.

Meanwhile, spending over that same time frame on programs for our seniors—namely Social Security and Medicare—has more than doubled to become an even larger share of the federal pie.*

While it's important to take care of our elders, we cannot do it at the expense of our children if we are to have a bright future.

At the same time, the federal budget has relied less on income taxes from American corporations, and more on income taxes from American families. In the 1950s, corporate income tax brought in about one out of every four dollars of

*Federal spending on children's programs fell from 20.1 percent to 15.4 percent between 1960 and 2005. Spending on entitlement programs for seniors rose from 22.1 percent to 45.9 percent for that same period.



federal tax revenues. By 2000, however, it had fallen to just one out of every ten tax dollars.³ In fact, the government recently reported that nearly two-thirds of U.S. corporations avoid paying any federal income taxes, even though they have trillions in sales.⁴

Children are a much bigger priority in the New Mexico state budget. We spend about 43 percent of the General Fund budget on K–12 education. That’s good, but we spend less than 4 percent on health care for children and less than 2 percent on all early childhood programs combined.

The Racial Divide

Every child deserves an equal start in life. But minority children are more likely than white kids to begin life at a disadvantage. That’s because they start out with inequities that are the result of generations of discriminatory practices and policies. When children start out with such disadvantages, they are far less likely to reach their potential.

The achievement gap among minority students is well-known, but fewer people realize that racial disparities are seen even when socioeconomic factors are taken into account or eliminated.



What’s more, racial disparities are reinforced by the very agencies that serve children. Youth of color are over-represented in juvenile justice and child welfare agencies across the country. Minority children are more likely than white children to be placed in foster care even when they come from similar situations. Likewise, young minorities are more often arrested and denied bond, and receive longer sentences and fewer suspended sentences than white youth who commit the same crimes.⁵

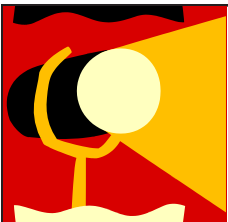
Which Children's Issues

Health Care

No child should be denied basic health care.

Out of all the world's richest countries, the United States is the only one that does not provide routine, preventive health care for every child. The landmark health care reform passed by Congress and signed by President Obama will change that, but it will take some time before all children are covered. In 2008, more than 8 million American children did not have health insurance.⁶ That's more than four times the entire population of New Mexico. In 2007, a baby was born without health insurance every 41 seconds.⁷

Of all 50 states, New Mexico has the second highest percentage of children without insurance. The vast majority of these kids live in working families.⁸ National health care reform will certainly change this, and New Mexico will benefit greatly by the additional Medicaid funds that will be invested here to cover more children from low- and moderate-income families.



Spotlight on Medicaid

Both state and federal governments do spend money on children's health care. If a child lives in a very low-income household, they may qualify for Medicaid, which also covers low-income seniors and adults with disabilities. Medicaid patients see the same doctors that treat the people who have private health insurance. One big difference is that Medicaid is much more cost-effective and efficient than private insurance. For every dollar we spend on private health insurance almost one-third is eaten up by bureaucracy and paperwork.⁹ In comparison, only 3 percent of every Medicaid dollar is spent on administration.¹⁰ Medicaid delivers good medicine in more ways than one. It injects a lot of federal money into New Mexico's economy, which creates jobs. Medicaid is crucial for the well-being of our state's health-care infrastructure—particularly in our rural areas. This means it helps keep costs down for everyone.

If all of the uninsured children in New Mexico held hands, they would stretch 66 miles. Those same kids could fill 1,582 school buses or form 9,667 little league teams.

think of our K–12 educational system as the software.

We all know that even excellent software will not run without the proper hardware. When kids haven't had the opportunity for good early brain development, they are not ready to begin school.

Their chances for success are much lower.

Education

Every child deserves a quality education and every school district should be equipped to supply it. The founders of this nation knew that democracy could not exist unless the people were informed. But the value of public education goes way beyond that. Education acts as a social equalizer, making our society safer and more stable, and our economy richer.

While the way in which we educate our children has changed a great deal since this country began, other aspects of our educational system have not caught up with modern science.

Over the last several years, scientific research has shown that 80 percent of our brain's development happens before our third birthday. Think of this brain development as the building of a computer's hardware—the creation of actual circuits and pathways that will allow a computer to process information. Now

Although we can improve our computers by adding more memory, we cannot do the same for our children. The window of opportunity for this critical early development closes after age three. During the first three years, children must get individual attention and stimulus in a safe and nurturing environment.



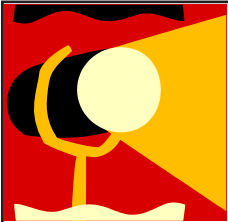
But fewer children are getting the high-quality attention they once got at home. Our economy has changed, and so have our families. Now, fewer and fewer families can get by on one paycheck, so more and more children are being cared

for outside of the home. Even though our need for quality childcare and early education programs has grown, little has been done to address the need on a national scale.

Our modern economy is also based more and more on jobs that require at least some college education, but our high school graduation rates are falling.¹¹ Even those kids who do graduate

from high school don't have many of the skills they need to succeed in today's workforce. Employers say that high school graduates lack basic math, grammar and spelling skills.¹²

As more Baby Boomers reach retirement age the demand for new employees will grow. More than ever, we need to prepare today's youth for tomorrow's jobs.



Spotlight on Childcare

Families must find a way to pay for childcare at a time when they can least afford it—when they are just starting out. High quality, full-time childcare can cost as much as college tuition but it gets just a fraction of the state and federal funding. The recession has made things much worse. Recently, the state cut the eligibility level for childcare assistance in half. Now, a single parent working full-time at the minimum wage earns too much money to qualify for help.

Quality childcare and early education prepare our children for school. Children who are not ready to start school are at a serious disadvantage—one that will likely follow them throughout the rest of their school years. Many of the world's richest countries are way ahead of us in making early care and education a public priority, and they make funding these programs as important as funding elementary school.

Even though most of the brain development occurs within the first three years of life, the vast majority of our public investment in education doesn't begin until the fifth year of life.

Child Poverty

Child poverty affects everyone. It is estimated that child poverty costs the US \$500 billion a year in lost worker productivity, and in spending on health care and the criminal justice system.¹³ Poverty is also the



single most important factor in a child's future well-being and success.

A household that is economically unstable—where families worry that their utilities will be shut off, they will be evicted, or there will not be any food on the table tomorrow—is a stressful household. When one car repair or serious illness can mean a family's financial disaster, children do not have the safety of a structured and predictable environment. This kind of stress has a negative impact on brain development and can contribute to problems at school.¹⁴

Children who grow up in poverty are less likely to receive routine health care and the nutrition needed for healthy development, and are more likely to get an inferior education, be exposed to illegal drug use, gang activity, and the violence that goes with it, and have a parent in jail. Thirteen million American children live in poverty and at least 2 million have parents in prison.¹⁵

No single program will solve child poverty because poverty has many causes that intersect to form a web. It will take

a long-term commitment and public support to defeat child poverty, but we will all benefit.

Work and Wages

No one who works full time should live in poverty. Yet, the majority of children in poverty have parents who work. Living wages and work supports, like paid sick days, are two important ways to address child poverty.

Poverty can impede children's cognitive development and their ability to learn, and can contribute to behavioral, social and emotional problems.

A living wage is one that can support a family, but employers are not required to pay a living wage. Low-wage jobs are not just bad for the employees in them—they also do not benefit the economy as much as high-wage jobs. The more money workers make, the more they have to spend and invest—and the more evenly the responsibility for taxes is spread.

Besides the lack of a living wage, America still has a wage gap. Women and minorities earn less money than white men.¹⁶ Women are also more likely to be single parents and to live in poverty.

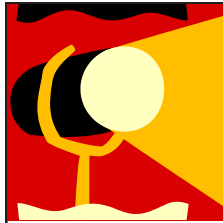
Work should lift you out of poverty – not keep you stuck in it.

Paid Sick Days and Family Leave

Working parents should not risk losing their job because they need to care for their sick child. But that's the reality for too many Americans. Almost 80 percent of low-wage workers and about half of all full-time, private-sector workers have no paid sick days.¹⁷ For many of them, taking a sick day not only means losing wages, it may mean losing their job.

Almost 80 percent of low-wage workers have no paid sick days.

The US also does not guarantee as much maternity and family leave as other wealthy nations do. We have no national policy to guarantee these basic work supports for all.



Spotlight on Income Tax Cuts

When income taxes are cut for the wealthy, it's often seen as a way to stimulate the economy, because tax cuts can create new jobs. What is less often said is that the same tax cuts could also mean job cuts. This is because tax cuts are usually paid for by cuts in government services. So governments must lay off police officers, firefighters, school teachers, child-care providers, public health workers, road crews, and many other public employees who keep services and programs running in our cities, states, and for the nation.



Tax cuts can equal job cuts

Prisons

Our prison system amounts to a revolving door, which doesn't serve anyone well. One out of every 100 Americans is behind bars, giving this country by far the most prisoners—both by number and by percentage of the population—in the world.¹⁸ Yet, we still have higher rates of homicide than many Western European countries.¹⁹ Clearly, our prison system isn't making our society any safer.

It's estimated that anywhere from 2 million to 10 million American children have a parent in prison, putting them at significant risk of entering the criminal justice system themselves. Overwhelmingly, our prisoners are racial and ethnic minorities, come from low-income backgrounds, and have little, if any, education.²⁰

Our recent prison boom has been mainly driven by policy changes in sentencing, such as three-strikes laws. While these types of laws are popular with the public, they aren't acting as deterrents. As a result, almost 70 percent of all released prisoners are rearrested within three years, and 50 percent are reconvicted.²¹

Our prisons and jails have become our default mental health wards and drug abuse facilities—except with very little funding for treatment programs. With-



out a significant investment in mental health and drug treatment, education, and job training, we are destined to continue this pattern. And we all pay for it in more ways than one.

Immigration

Children should not be punished for the actions of their parents. Immigration

is often in the news—particularly the issue of undocumented immigrants. What's usually missing from these news reports, though, is the way in which our immigration policies affect children.

On average, for every two immigrant adults detained in a workplace raid, one child is left behind.²² Two-thirds of these kids are either U.S. citizens or legal residents.²³ Not only do these kids suffer, but so do the community groups that assist them—from schools to churches to food banks. These groups take on significant care-giving responsibilities and economic support of children left behind.

Why You Should Care About Kids

Of course there are numerous moral reasons for helping those who are more vulnerable than ourselves. There is also a great deal of personal satisfaction to be gained from helping others. But perhaps the most universal reason we should all care about the well-being of all children is because doing so improves the quality of life for everyone. Today's kids are tomorrow's scientists, doctors, teachers, and entrepreneurs who will have much to contribute to society. Those same kids can also turn out to be tomorrow's criminals, drug addicts, and chronic welfare recipients who will have little, if anything, to contribute. Investing in their well-being today will create a brighter future for everyone.

What You Can Do

These are just some of the issues we'd like you to consider before you go to the polls in November. We'd also like you to consider them good reasons for going to the polls. Children can't vote, so they depend on us to.

There are many ways to find out the candidates' platforms on children's issues. Check out their campaign websites, send them a letter or email, call their campaign office, or ask questions at candidate forums.

Questions You Might Ask

- ✓ Low-income workers pay a much higher percentage of their paychecks in state and local taxes than high-income workers. What will you do to make our tax system more fair?
- ✓ Will you promise to aggressively pursue implementation of federal health care reform?
- ✓ Will you commit enough funding to cover all eligible children in Medicaid?
- ✓ Will you commit to fully funding high-quality early care and education programs for all young children?
- ✓ What will you do to address racial disparities for children of color?
- ✓ What will you do to ensure a living wage and paid sick and family leave for all workers?
- ✓ How do you propose moving more nonviolent offenders into treatment instead of incarceration?
- ✓ What do you propose be done for children who are left behind when their parents are rounded up in a workplace immigration raid?

Check Out the Candidates

Go to the **Secretary of State's** website for a list of candidates for state offices (NM Legislature, Public Regulation Commission, justices and district judges, etc.): www.sos.state.nm.us; or call 505-827-3600 or 800-477-3632

Go to the state **Legislature's** website to find out who your legislators are and how to contact them:

<http://legis.state.nm.us/lcs/>

Other Resources

- ✓ Analysis of campaign ads (The Annenberg Political Fact Check): www.factcheck.org
- ✓ Congressional voting records (Project Vote Smart): www.votesmart.org
- ✓ Voters' guides and election information (League of Women Voters of New Mexico): www.lwvnm.org

Organizations that work on children's issues, health care, and poverty:

- ✓ Annie E. Casey Foundation: www.aecf.org
- ✓ Children's Defense Fund: www.childrensdefense.org
- ✓ Every Child Matters Education Fund: www.everychildmatters.org
- ✓ Fight Crime: Invest in Kids: www.fightcrime.org/
- ✓ First Focus: www.firstfocus.net
- ✓ Half in Ten: www.halfinten.org
- ✓ National Center for Children in Poverty: <http://nccp.org>
- ✓ New Mexico Voices for Children: www.nmvoices.org
- ✓ Ounce of Prevention: www.ounceofprevention.org
- ✓ Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity: www.spotlightonpoverty.org
- ✓ Voices for America's Children: www.voices.org

Voting in New Mexico

To vote, you must be:

- ✓ A citizen of the United States;
- ✓ A resident of New Mexico;
- ✓ Eighteen (18) years old or older at the time of the next election;
- ✓ Registered by the deadline (5pm, Oct. 5, 2010);
- ✓ Not legally declared mentally incapacitated;
- ✓ If you are a felon you must have completed all of the terms and conditions of your sentencing.

Registering to vote:

- ✓ You may register in person at the Office of the County Clerk in the county where you live (see the blue pages in your telephone directory) or at the Secretary of State's Office.
- ✓ You may request a voter registration application be mailed to your residence.
- ✓ You may register to vote when applying for a new or renewed driver's license, when applying for certain public assistance or services, and at public libraries, colleges and universities.

✓ You may register at any organized voter registration drive or with any Third Party Voter Registrant Agent.

Where to vote:

✓ If you vote early, you may vote at any of the voting sites in your county. If you vote on Election Day, you must vote at your precinct, which is listed on your voter registration card. If you have questions, call your County Clerk's office.

✓ Polling places are open from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm on Election Day (Tuesday, Nov. 2, 2010).

✓ You may vote early Tuesday–Friday from 12:00 noon to 8:00 pm and Saturday from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm (Oct. 16–Oct. 30)

✓ You may also vote in your County Clerk's office 28 days before the election during regular hours of business.

Every registered voter in New Mexico has the right to:

✓ Cast a ballot if you are in line when the polls close;

✓ Inspect a sample ballot before voting;

✓ Ask for and receive instructions on how to operate the voting machine or mark a paper ballot;

✓ Ask for and receive instructions on how to cast a provisional ballot if your name is not on the list of voters;

✓ Vote a provisional ballot if you registered by mail for the first time in this county and did not provide identification when you registered or do not have it with you on election day;

✓ Vote by emergency paper ballot if the voting machine is broken and cannot be repaired in a reasonable length of time;

✓ Ask for, receive, and vote another paper ballot if your paper ballot is spoiled or defective;

✓ Be assisted by a person of your choice if you are disabled or need help reading the ballot (some exceptions include: your employer, a representative of your union, or a candidate on the ballot); and

✓ Vote free from intimidation by election officials or any other person.

To report complaints or irregularities in the polling place: Call the Secretary of State's office at 800-477-3632

For more information: Call the Bureau of Elections at 505-827-3600, 800-477-3632

Native American Election Information Program: Call 505-827-3600, 800-477-3632

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