Disability Connection Podcast Transcript – October 2026

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:00:10

Hello, and welcome to the Disability Connection. I'm your host, Barbara L'Italien. I'm the Executive Director of the Disability Law Center.

The Disability Connection is produced by the Disability Law Center. We're the Protection and Advocacy agency for Massachusetts and are part of a national network of disability rights agencies investigating abuse and neglect and providing legal representation and other advocacy services to people with disabilities. Our website is w-w-w dot DLC dash MA dot org.

Today, I am joined by Brianna Zimmerman, DLC's Voting Rights Advocate. Hello, Brianna.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:00:50

Hello.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:00:53

Are you doing well today?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:00:54

Yes, thanks for having me again.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:00:56

Terrific.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:00:58

So, you and I have done a few of these now, because this is a big election year, and we're coming right up to the general statewide election. So, can you tell people a little bit about what they need to be aware of on that?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:01:01

Yes.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:01:12

So, there will be a general statewide election, like you said, coming up on November 3rd. That's a Tuesday.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:01:18

And we're going to decide who wins the election and vote on ballot questions that actually change the law. So, voters have a direct say in how laws change.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:01:32

Massachusetts already had our primary election on September 1st.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:01:38

So, Brianna, I'd love you to go over again the timelines for registering to vote so that people can participate in this general election.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:01:47

People need to be registered to vote 10 days before any election in Massachusetts, so the voter registration deadline for the Tuesday, November 3rd election is going to be Saturday, October 24th.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:02:00

And can you just briefly tell people how they can learn about registering to vote?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:02:05

Yeah, voters can register or check their registration status in 3 different ways, um, online, by mail, or in person.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:02:15

You can always visit www.sec.state.ma.us/ovr for more information about each of those methods. And before registering, you can always check whether you're already registered, confirm that your information is current.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:02:37

Include your name, address, and political party by visiting that website. So, anybody can check their registration information online.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:02:46

So, who will we be voting for in this year's statewide elections?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:02:51

Voters are going to see a mix of federal, statewide, legislative, county and local offices on the ballot. These might include members of Congress, Governor and Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, Treasurer, Auditor, State Senators and Representatives, and some county or local election officials.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:03:19

So, this year is a really interesting year in that there are a number of ballot questions that people will see on their ballot. Can you share more about that?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:03:32

There will be 9 statewide ballot questions this year, which is... a pretty high number. Um, every voter in Massachusetts will vote on the same statewide ballot questions, regardless of where you live in Massachusetts.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:03:48

And ballot questions, uh, like I mentioned earlier, give voters a direct voice in whether certain laws should change or not. So, also note that some cities and towns might have local ballot questions, depending on where you live, so you'll want to check out your city or town's website for more information about those potential local ballot questions. But across the state, um, everyone will be voting on the same 9 questions.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:04:17

So, let's briefly go through the nine questions. And we're giving very basic information here. There are other sources that you will mention later where people can get more detail. But we're trying to strip these down to the essentials. So, can you go over ballot question one for us, please?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:04:36

Ballot Question 1 asks voters whether they support making most records from the state legislature, that's our state lawmakers, and the Governor's Office public.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:04:47

So, this would make it easier for the public to access information about what state lawmakers and the Governor's Office are doing.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:04:56

And how is that different from current law?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:04:58

So, right now, most Massachusetts government agencies have to follow the public records law, which means that members of the public can request records and agencies have to follow certain rules and timelines around when they get those records to people and how they get records to people.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:05:19

The legislature and the Governor's Office are not included in that public records law, and so they are not currently required to release records in the same way.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:05:32

So, what would a yes vote mean on this question?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:05:35

So, a yes vote means that you support making the state legislature's and Governor's Office's records public.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:05:42

And what would a no vote mean?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:05:44

And a no vote means that you oppose or you don't support making the state legislature's and Governor's Office's records public.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:05:53

So, what about valid question two?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:05:56

So, question 2 asks voters whether they support allowing employees of the Committee for Public Counsel Services, also known as CPCS, to collectively bargain.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:06:08

What does CPCS do?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:06:11

CPCS provides legal services to people who can't afford attorneys across Massachusetts in both criminal and non-criminal cases.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:06:21

And they want to be able to collectively bargain. What does that mean?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:06:26

Collective bargaining is a process where employees negotiate (most often through labor unions that they pay a fee to be a part of) with their employer. They negotiate a contract, and contracts decide things like employees' working hours, benefits, salaries, time off, and different working conditions.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:06:48

Okay. And so currently, those employees are not allowed to collectively bargain. What would a yes vote mean on question two?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:06:58

So, a yes vote allows employees of CPCS to collectively bargain. And basically, as the voters, we're not deciding whether or not they become unionized. Basically, we're just giving them permission to decide for themselves whether they want to unionize or collectively bargain.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:07:18

A no vote would keep the laws as is so that CPCS employees can't unionize or collectively bargain. They won't have that option if we vote no.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:07:29

Okay, great. So, can you tell us about question three?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:07:34

Question 3 asks voters whether they support replacing party primaries for state elections with an all-party primary. So, under this system, everyone would receive the same primary ballot, regardless of political party, with candidates from all political parties and affiliations.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:07:53

Affiliations are also known as third parties, listed together on the same ballot. So, the two candidates with the most votes in the primary would move on to the general election, regardless of their political party.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:08:06

That means the two candidates from the same party could run against each other in the general election.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:08:12

How would this change general elections?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:08:16

So right now, people who vote in the Democratic primaries, for example, choose which candidate runs against the Republican candidate in the general or November election, and vice versa.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:08:27

And third-party candidates never compete in the primaries, but they're always listed on the general election ballot.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:08:33

So right now, if there's a candidate in each party running against each other during the general election, you're going to choose always between one Democrat, one Republican, (as long as there's each one running), and any third-party candidates to win the election.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:08:50

But this ballot question would change that process, so instead of choosing one party's candidates in a primary, voters would see all candidates on one primary ballot.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:09:00

And the top two vote-getters would advance to the general election, even if they belong to the same political party.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:09:08

Okay. So that's a bit confusing, I think, for many. But can you explain what a yes and a no vote would mean on question three?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:09:18

So, a yes vote means that you support creating an all-party primary that lists all candidates on the same ballot for state primary elections.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:09:28

And a no vote means that you oppose this and would keep elections the same as they are now, with political party primaries.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:09:36

Okay. Ah - moving on to question four. Could you tell us about that, please?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:09:42

Question four asks voters whether they support Election Day voter registration. So, if passed, eligible voters who are not registered to vote on Election Day could register at their polling place on Election Day and then cast a ballot - all in the same day.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:10:00

And how would this change the way voter registration works right now?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:10:04

So currently, you need to register to vote at least ten days before any election, as I mentioned previously. Um, if you go into your polling place on election day and you're not registered, you can't vote.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:10:17

So, this law would allow you to go into your polling place on election day, get assistance with registering to vote from poll workers, and as long as you're eligible, you'll be able to register and vote at the same time.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:10:31

So, this would only, um, apply to people that are voting in person on Election Day -not to people who are voting early.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:10:41

Okay, so what is a yes vote versus a no vote on question four?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:10:46

A yes vote would support the change in law to let voters register to vote or update their voter registration on election day. A no vote would oppose this change and make no changes to voter registration.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:11:00

Okay, so could you tell us about question five, please?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:11:04

Question 5 asks voters whether they support changing how Massachusetts calculates its annual tax revenue limit. So that means how much tax we can collect in a year.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:11:17

If passed, the law would change the formula, or calculation, for that limit, and it would require the state to return tax money collected above the limit back to taxpayers.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:11:30

So, Brianna, what does a yes vote mean for question five?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:11:36

A yes vote supports changing the calculation of the tax revenue limit. And that basically would lead to lower taxes and more returns for taxpayers.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:11:46

And what would a no vote mean for question five?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:11:50

A no vote would oppose these changes and keep the tax revenue limit calculation the same. So, some people are worried that this would lead to cuts in the state budget and important services if passed.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:12:05

Okay. Could you tell us, please, about question six?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:12:10

Question 6 asks voters whether they support creating a 'Nature for All Fund' by redirecting certain sales tax revenue to conservation efforts.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:12:21

So, before July 2028, half of sales tax revenues from sporting goods, recreational vehicles like ATVs, um, and golf courses would go into the fund. And then after July 2028, all of those sales taxes would go into the fund. And it would create a commission to oversee the money.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:12:43

So, what would a yes and a no vote mean for this question, for question six?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:12:49

A yes vote supports creating a 'Nature for All Fund', and a no vote opposes this so that the sales taxes from sporting goods, recreational vehicles, and golf courses can fund any state programs.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:13:04

Okay. Uh - could you tell us about question seven?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:13:08

Question 7 asks voters whether they support requiring towns and cities to allow single-family homes on residential lots of 5,000 square feet.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:13:19

And how would that change where single-family homes are built currently?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:13:25

So currently, cities and towns decide how much land is required to build a single-family home. A lot of times, they have requirements that are over that 5,000 square foot number. Um, this question would require every city and town to allow single-family homes on 5,000 square foot lots, which could increase the number of single-family homes that are built across Massachusetts.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:13:49

So, what would a yes and a no vote mean on question seven?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:13:55

A yes vote would support changing the requirement for single family homes to 5,000 square feet across the state. A no vote would oppose these changes so that local governments still make their own decisions on lot size requirements.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:14:11

Great. Thank you. And we're up to question eight. Could you tell us a little bit about question eight, please?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:14:18

So, Question 8 asks voters whether they support repealing or taking away parts of the Massachusetts law that allow for recreational marijuana sales, and taxes, home cultivation, which means growing of cannabis for personal use, and current limits on how much marijuana adults can possess.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:14:42

So, could you explain, please, what a yes vote and a no vote mean on question 8?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:14:47

A yes vote on question 8 would support a change in the law, and that would take away current laws that allow for the sale, regulation, and tax of recreational marijuana. And it would also reduce the amount of marijuana people can possess without penalties.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:15:04

A no vote would oppose these changes and keep the law the same so that the laws on sale, regulation, tax, cultivation, possession stay the same. And recreational marijuana sales would stay legal. Taxes could still be collected on sales.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:15:24

So lastly, could you please tell us about question nine?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:15:28

Question 9 asks voters whether they support keeping a law that made changes to firearm regulations, and that law changed rules about who can own a firearm, firearm tracing through things like serial numbers and assault-style firearm bans.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:15:46

So, what does a yes vote mean on Question 9?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:15:49

A yes vote would keep the current firearm regulations that Massachusetts passed.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:15:55

And what would a no vote mean on question nine?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:56:00

A no vote would repeal or take away that bill that made changes to firearm regulations.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:16:06

Okay. Alright, so, um, where can people turn to inform themselves further on the candidates or the ballot questions, um, before they need to cast their vote?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:16:21

So, there's a few different ways that you can inform yourself, um, before the November election. You can visit the Secretary of State's website for information about upcoming elections and statewide ballot questions.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:16:35

You can check your city or town election office's website for local ballot information.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:16:42

You could also use resources like Vote411.org or Ballotpedia.org. Those do a really good job of breaking down different candidates' positions and also different ballot questions.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:16:57

And you can also sign up for REV Up Massachusetts email list at www.revupma.org to learn about events that can help prepare you to vote.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:17:09

Great. And my apologies for jumping in, but I was going to mention also that the Secretary of State's office mails to every household a red book that's about 81 pages. So, it's very long, you know, but that is another source of information with very detailed for and against on all the nine ballot questions.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:17:28

Okay, so what should people with disabilities know about their voting rights ahead of this election?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:17:35

So, voters with disabilities have the right to vote privately, independently, accessibly, and with assistance if they choose.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:17:43

So, no one should be able to see how you vote without your permission. You don't need to show anyone your ballot. If you prefer to vote by yourself, you should be able to do so without help.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:17:56

Voting accessibly means you should be able to vote in the way that works best for you, whether that's in person, during early voting, by mail, or by electronic ballot if you qualify. If you want help, you can choose anyone except your employer, boss, or labor union to help you.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:18:15

You can always ask your local election office about any accommodation that you might need. Remember, your polling place from the parking lot to the voting area should be accessible to you.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:18:26

So, what happens if you do encounter an issue with voting?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:18:30

If you run into issues, you have multiple options. The first is to speak to the warden or the head of your polling place and ask for help.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:18:39

And you can also reach out to your local election office by phone on election day. They might be able to resolve an issue pretty quickly.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:18:48

Great. And what if that doesn't work?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:18:50

You can also reach out to the Election Protection Hotline, which is staffed by trained volunteers in every state, including Massachusetts. You can call or text 866-OUR-VOTE or visit 866ourvote.org.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:19:06

And you can also reach out to the Secretary of State's office by calling 1-800-462-VOTE or emailing elections@sec.state.ma.us.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:19:20

So, are you interested in people sharing with Disability Law Center if they have difficult voting experiences?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:19:27

Absolutely. So, to share your experiences, you can contact DLC, visit our website at w-w-w dot DLC dash MA dot org or call 617-723-8455.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:19:42

Depending on capacity, we might not be able to help immediately on election day, but it's really important for our advocacy that we know about any voting accessibility issues you have.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:19:54

So lastly, this is a really important election year. Is there a way in which people can get involved in getting out the vote and making sure our elections are accessible?

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:20:05

Absolutely. Rev Up Massachusetts is a group of organizations and individuals, including DLC, who help people register to vote, educate voters, and advocate for accessible voting processes.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:20:20

We're looking for more members to participate in our meetings - anyone can join - volunteers to help people with disabilities in our communities register to vote, and we're also looking for volunteers to survey local polling places to make sure they're accessible. So, if you're interested in getting involved, please visit our website and sign up for our email list at w-w-w dot REV UP MA dot org.

[Brianna Zimmerman] 00:20:43

You can also email us at info at REV UP MA dot org.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:20:50

So that's our time for today. Thank you so much, Brianna, for all that information. And I want to thank people for joining us. And just to let you know that this show is available on our website and as a podcast. So please follow us on social media.

[Barbara L'Italien] 00:20:58

Uh, and you can do that by going to our website at w-w-w dot DLC dash MA dot org for the links. Thank you so much.