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## **New *Elections Act* enables changes to improve accessibility for disabled electors**

(Halifax) -- The new *Elections Act* will facilitate many improvements for electors with disabilities, according to Christine McCulloch, Nova Scotia's Chief Electoral Officer. Ms. McCulloch spoke of those improvements at the **Awareness Week** breakfast of the Partnership for Access Awareness Nova Scotia (PAANS).

"The previous *Elections Act* was very rigid," said Ms. McCulloch. "In detail, it said not only what election officers did but also how they had to do it. It was a static rather than a living statute."

"While we have made progress in improving physical access, increasingly the emphasis is on a goal to have all qualified voters able to vote independently," said Ms. McCulloch. "To approach this goal, we need the help of the disabled community."

Ms. McCulloch spoke about the piloting provisions in the new Act that enable trials of new procedures and technologies in by-elections or in a limited number of electoral districts during a general election. "It is my hope that together we can identify opportunities to improve the voting process for persons with disabilities and then obtain the approval of the House of Assembly to test them in a pilot project setting," she said.

Providing assistance to those who require assistance often entails having someone – a relative or close friend – know how one votes. This is problematic because the secret ballot is no less important to voters with vision impairment or limited physical mobility.

The Chief Electoral Officer announced that she will establish an advisory committee – another feature of the new *Elections Act* – to help Elections Nova Scotia move toward barrier free access to voting and participation as candidates in Nova Scotia elections.

Elections Nova Scotia also will look at its operations with the goal of involving more people with disabilities in the election process as workers in returning offices and polling places.

The Partnership for Access Awareness Nova Scotia (PAANS) is a committee of the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities.

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*The complete text of Ms. McCulloch address to the Awareness Week breakfast is available at the Elections Nova Scotia website at [www.electionsnovascotia.com](http://www.electionsnovascotia.com)*

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