

# PRESENTATION SUMMARY

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SURREY PUBLIC HEARING  
DATED 31 MAY 2004  
AT THE SHERATON GUILDFORD HOTEL

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE PRESENTATION TO THE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM. IT ATTEMPTS TO CAPTURE THE KEY ISSUES AND ARGUMENTS THAT WERE PRESENTED AND DISCUSSED DURING THE PUBLIC HEARING. IN SOME INSTANCES, THE PRESENTER HAS ALSO MADE A SUBMISSION TO THE ASSEMBLY AND THIS IS ACCESSIBLE VIA THE WEBSITE AT [WWW.CITIZENSASSEMBLY.BC.CA](http://WWW.CITIZENSASSEMBLY.BC.CA) BY CLICKING ON "GET INVOLVED". IF SUCH A SUBMISSION IS AVAILABLE, IT WILL BE NOTED AT THE END OF THIS REPORT.

# Penny Leclair

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## DESCRIPTION OF PRESENTATION

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The special needs that people who are deaf-blind have when citizens are given the opportunity to vote. A brief explanation of why the voting process is inadequate at present, and my suggestions of how to improve the system.

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## KEY THEMES

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Ms. Leclair discussed the right of Canadians to vote in privacy and with dignity which is often denied to citizens who are Deaf-blind. The presenter argued for adherence to the KISS principle (Keep It Simple Stupid) when considering change to the democratic process. Ms. Leclair stated that declining voter turnout may be partially attributed to the complexity of the system, and as such, the objective criteria of the ease of voting should be employed when considering electoral reform. The presenter offered her support for the recommendations of the Law Commission of Canada which advocated the introduction of an element of proportionality into the electoral system, thereby enhancing democratic governance by enabling a more accurate translation of votes into seats. Ms. Leclair also discussed the difficulty of gaining information about all potential local members and the problem of party discipline in the legislature that effectively tempers local representation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Ms. Leclair made two primary recommendations:

1. That each polling station provide all information in large print, audio format and Braille. Each polling station would have a few copies of each type of alternative format which can be used several times by different voters throughout election day. This is not a costly process, and it will allow many people who are blind and partially sighted to vote without assistance and in privacy. Large print can be read by everyone, so this system of voting is inclusive and respects the right to read of every citizen.
2. That the electoral system adopted be simple as possible while enabling votes cast to be reflected by seats won in the legislature. Ms. Leclair argued that simplifying the voting process would energize and motivate more citizens to vote. This could be accomplished by adopting an electoral system that facilitates voting for parties.

*Quote: Having a third person to translate voting information does not respect a citizen's right to privacy when casting a vote.*

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QUESTIONS, ANSWERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE AUDIENCE

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Q Did you say that you have to pay a fee to have the ballot interpreted if you wanted to go and vote?

A If I wanted to vote, if I could hear, I would have to pay someone to go to the polling booth with me to read the information to me. I used to be able to hear something, but I have lost my hearing completely so I haven't voted for 10 years. My husband signs but he isn't very good and it isn't private so I would have to pay someone.

Comment Can the Assembly look into enabling persons who can't read the ballot, not only blind people, but people who can't read, if they have to pay for that service? It is a question for the Assembly to put in their notes.

Response If the person is blind someone at the polling station will read the information, they have people available to do that and they swear on the bible that they won't disclose that information. Blind people don't have to pay anything as they can have someone read them the ballot, but I am also deaf so there is no way for them to tell me the information. But that shouldn't matter, people should be able to read the ballot and it is really significant to me that in 2004 we still don't have a readable ballot for blind and visually impaired people and that's disgusting.