

Speaker 1 ([00:03](#)):

[Intro Music]

Alie B. ([00:27](#)):

how low inclusion believers and welcome to the access champions podcast. I'm Alie B Gorrie associate producer of the podcast and I'm here to facilitate this week's journey into the galaxies of access, diversity and inclusion. Today we'll dive back into our new throwback series, ACP rewind. In this series we will catch up with the previous guest of the podcast and find out about their latest contributions to the world of access and inclusion. After a brief little update, we will highlight their work as we replay their original episode because we all love a good throwback. Before we dive in to ACP rewind, I want to remind you all to stay connected with us during these unprecedented times. Feel free to reach out, connect with us on our social media at access champion on Instagram and Twitter and the access champion podcast on Facebook. Reach out to us via email at accesschampion@gmail.com and drop us a line.

Alie B. ([01:31](#)):

We are always looking to expand our community. Also, if you're looking for more access champion stories, more content, more exclusives, come find us on Patreon purchase a dollar a month. You can have access to all kinds of bonus content, access champion swag on air shout outs and so much more truly everyone. It only takes a dollar a month to join us on Patreon. Thank you so much for considering joining our team of inclusion warriors. You can find us at www.patreon.com/accesschampions. We really appreciate your support today. We catch up with Michelle Bishop, also known as the voting rights defender. This ketchup is super important as we are in an election year and voting issues are even further complicated by COVID 19 let's see what Michelle has to say and what she's up to these days.

Michelle Bishop ([02:33](#)):

Hi y'all. It's Michelle Bishop from the national disability rights network. I think you all at access champions know me as the voting rights defender. I'm so honored to be checking back in with you here live broadcasting from my makeshift office. I set up in my dining room because in Virginia like all of you were still under stay at home orders in relation to COVID 19 well here we are in is 2020 and was really going to be our year. Wasn't it? I mean, a presidential election is always a big deal, but this election had all the indicators of just massive turnout, record levels of turnout. Everyone was really going to make their voices heard and Hey, maybe they still will. Right? But one thing we know is that the COVID 19 pandemic is definitely changing the way we run our elections and the way voters interact with the system.

Michelle Bishop ([03:27](#)):

And as you all, I'm sure, can guess that always brings with it implications for access for people with disabilities. So let's break it down real quick into what smallest pieces. Uh, first and foremost, there's been changes to the elections calendar. A lot of States have chosen to delay their elections, especially those elections that were supposed to occur in March. Now there's a lot of good reason for that going forward with an impersonal action in the middle of March before you've even reached the peak of a pandemic, certainly sounds irresponsible. It's not social distancing, but it also gave elections officials a little time to figure out how they were gonna run an election in such an unanticipated environment. So there's a lot of good reason for those delays. But of course that can always mean confusion for voters, right? So we have to stay vigilant to make sure that elections officials are communicating very clearly

with voters, making sure they're up to date when they know when the election is happening, and all the deadlines that have changed.

Michelle Bishop ([04:24](#)):

But also that they have a really robust plan for communicating that information and they're thinking about accessible formats and finding all the potential voters out there, including people with disabilities to make sure that they stay in the know. But let's talk about the biggest issue and that is the meteoric rise of vote by mail. Now, vote by mail was already gaining in popularity among elections officials. More and more States were going to all vote by mail or expanding their vote by mail. So it was coming one way or another. But coven 19 means we're all moving towards a vote by mail very, very quickly. We suddenly went into warp speed and there's a lot of good reason for that as well. If we're supposed to be staying at home and we're supposed to be socially distancing. If everyone can just get their ballot at home and fill it out at home and drop it in the mail or leave it for their postal carrier to pick up or take to a drop off center that's secured, maybe it doesn't even have to be manned by a person.

Michelle Bishop ([05:20](#)):

That certainly helps us to keep that social distance. It might cut down on some of the COVID 19 risk factors, especially for people with disabilities who are considered among what they call the most vulnerable when it comes to the Corona virus. The problem is we've yet to make vote by mail fully accessible in a lot of States that don't have a robust, a vote by mail program don't really have any way of making their vote by mail accessible. The traditional way of doing it is exactly how it sounds. We mail people a paper ballot. Well, let's say I'm blind and I go to vote at my polling place and all they can do is hand me paper ballot and a pen to fill it out with. If I'm blind, I can't see it. I can't read what's on it. I don't know where to mark it.

Michelle Bishop ([06:03](#)):

I can't fill it out privately and independently, which is my right under federal law, and if I ask someone to help me, I lose the secrecy of my ballot. Now, if you mail me that paper ballot at home, I don't magically become cited when I sit down with my ballot at my kitchen table. If it wasn't accessible to me at a polling place, it's not accessible to me in my home either. So mailing everyone a paper ballot just doesn't cut it. The best option that we have right now is remote ballot marking or electronic delivery of blank ballots, and that's where you can get an email with a link where you can load that ballot electronically. So if you have a laptop or a desktop or a tablet or whatever at home, they can access the internet or has reliable cellular data service. You can actually download your ballot and complete it on your computer.

Michelle Bishop ([06:50](#)):

So if you need any at T you have on your computer, you just need to be able to zoom in on it or you need to use an audio ballot. You can do all of those things and you can Mark your ballot. Now, here's the problem. That almost always requires that when you're done, you print your ballot and you still have to return a paper ballot just like other voters. Now, once again, let's say I'm that blind voter, I can't see that printed piece of paper so I can never verify my vote. I can never say this ballot says what I intended for it to say worse yet, if for any reason I can't handle that piece of paper, then I can't pull it off the printer and fold it up and get in the envelope and return it myself, which means once again, I need an assistant and I might be sacrificing the secrecy of my ballot, Nellis ed, COVIT 19 on top of all that.

Michelle Bishop ([07:36](#)):

If, uh, if I need someone to assist me but I'm sheltering in place and I live alone, I might not be able to get that assistant. Or if you're like me and you just don't own a printer at home in the local library down the street closed because of the pandemic, you may not be able to print your ballot at all. So not only is a, generally not 100% accessible, but in the context of COVID 19 there's additional challenges. Now there's one more option. Some places even allow you to send the ballot back electronically. You hear a lot about mobile phone voting can download an app to my phone, I fill out my ballot and he send it back electronically. Well, that sounds pretty good, except usually your elections official prints off a ballot when they receive it and they count and save that paper ballot.

Michelle Bishop ([08:19](#)):

So once again, I haven't been able to verify that that ballot says what I wanted for it to say, which is a really important part of the voting process, but also either one of these options as much as they make voting by mail more accessible, they rely on you, the voter having everything you need to be able to cast your ballot. You have to have some type of computer or tablet or smartphone, and you have to have access to cellular data or internet. And to be honest, not everyone has those things, especially when we talk about cellular data service or internet service in really rural areas and on native American reservations, that still doesn't necessarily exist. It's not your responsibility as the voter to have everything that you need to be able to cast your ballot. It's the responsibility of your government to provide you everything that you need to be able to cast your ballot.

Michelle Bishop ([09:09](#)):

So while it helps, and while every state who doesn't have these things better be running out and getting them right now, it doesn't make voting 100% accessible for people with disabilities. So what are we going to do? Realistically, we may still need some in-person option for voting and that's the part that I don't know if I can help you with polling places are voluntary, your local library or school or church or whatever it is, it's not required to serve as a polling place and right now they can decline to serve if they don't want to during a pandemic. And quite frankly, some of them like nursing homes and residential facilities probably should to protect their residents. But also your poll workers are volunteers and I don't know about you, but I wouldn't be jumping up and down to serve as a poll worker right now and interact personally with thousands of voters who may not even know that they have the virus.

Michelle Bishop ([10:00](#)):

Wisconsin just had in-person elections and in the city of Milwaukee, they're supposed to be 180 polling places. They only had five, five instead of 180 they could only get five locations and they had to use the national guard to serve as poll workers. So that's of course way less than ideal. When we have that few locations, we have too many people. It's really difficult to keep them socially distanced and to sanitize in between each voter. If you look at what happened in Milwaukee, the lines to vote were several city blocks. Long people were standing blocks away from the polling place they were trying to go to because there were too many people in line and they were trying to stay six feet apart, so if we're going to have some sort of in-person voting, which we probably need for accessibility purposes, we have to be able to guarantee that we can make it safe, which is why I really can't help you because I am not an expert in infectious disease, but we also probably still have to rely on a large number of people opting to vote by mail so that we can cut down on the number of people who are trying to socially distance and still go to a polling place.

Michelle Bishop ([11:10](#)):

If what you're hearing from everything I am saying is that there isn't one great answer to all of these problems, then that's because that is what I'm telling you. This election, no matter what is going to be challenging for everyone, it's asking us to make a lot of changes very quickly with nowhere near enough resources. So I'll say this to all you loyal listeners. Don't you ever, ever give up your right to vote? Don't you ever forfeit your chance to be heard and have a say in who represents you in your government with your tax dollars? Whatever we have to do, we're going to get out there and we're going to vote and we're going to be heard. Know what your options are. Learn what it is that your state is doing to make voting as accessible and as safe as possible for all voters. Figure out what's going to work best for you and make sure you get to cast your ballot on election day. The future of our democracy depends on you participating and making your voice heard. Thank you everyone for listening to this update. I appreciate all of you and please go vote.

Alie B. ([12:24](#)):

Now, let's travel back in time to episode 11 when Michelle first graced us with her presence. We hope you enjoy hearing from Michelle in all her advocate glory. You'll also hear from a few other special guests in this episode, so stay tuned and let's get to it,

Speaker 1 ([12:45](#)):

[rewind sound effect]

Philip D. ([12:56](#)):

hello inclusion believers, and welcome to the access champions podcast. I'm your host, Phil Dallmann for this week's journey into the galaxy of accessibility and inclusion. We've got a jam packed episode for you this week, so we're going to dive right on. In. Our guest this week is Michelle Bishop, who is the disability advocacy specialist. We're voting rights for the national disability rights network besides bringing a wealth of knowledge to the podcast, I was, uh, super excited to have Michelle on because she's sort of our first organic guest. We highlighted an article she wrote for the Huffington post on episode four of the podcast, our first episode where we kind of highlighted different articles and things that were happening around the country and around the world, and we were able to connect via social media. Um, and she so graciously agreed to come on the podcast and chat about the current state of our voting system and the tenuous nature of voting rights for many people in our country.

Philip D. ([13:55](#)):

Speaking of organic, my phone just lit up. Uh, my fiancée just found her wedding dress, uh, which is very, very exciting. So, uh, shout out. Zanza Steinberg my soon to be wife, uh, who found her wedding dress today. Um, very exciting. Before we get to the interview, um, I do also want to give a quick shout out to, uh, Karamo Brown, one of the stars of Netflix's queer eye. Uh, Karamo really stepped up over the last month or so, uh, to join him pushing Netflix in increasing the quality of their captions for viewers with hearing loss. And additionally, he pushed his followers of which he has almost 200,000 on Twitter alone to make their content more accessible. That's using your platform in a truly impactful way. Um, this was brought to my attention by Leah Kerner, um, who's constantly sending us stuff for the podcast and is an access champion in her own right.

Philip D. ([14:47](#)):

But, uh, Karamo, uh, thank you for being an champion. Um, and we'd love to have you on the podcast in the future, continuing the conversation from last week and one that's going to be ongoing for who

knows how long it may go on for as long as the podcast goes on. Because I don't know how quickly we're going to, uh, figure this out. Um, but I, I, I have faith that we will, um, but this conversation on inspiration porn, Katie Kedell reached out, uh, this week with some thoughts. Uh, Katie wears a ton of hats in the DC area, uh, but specifically works as the access coordinator at imagination stage down in Bethesda, um, and is an artistic ally for ally theater also down in that area.

Katie K. ([15:33](#)):

My question for everybody is how do we as advocates and allies articulate what is happening in the world of accessibility to get to funders to get new people on board, um, without leaning into disability of porn. I often find that when people are experiencing accessibility and they can see themselves in the role of savior, they are much more ready to be on board and be excited. But that is at the cost of the person that they are providing access to.

Philip D. ([16:04](#)):

I think that's an excellent question and thought, Katie, um, I know during my time at TDF, when I was put in front of a donor, uh, it was really clear that the idea of being a savior to a community was really appealing, uh, to them more often than not. And I knew I had two or three stories depending on the program that I could run out that lived in sort of that world. I'm not sure what the answer is there. Um, but let's keep the conversation going. Let's keep sending your thoughts on the subject. Tweet at us, uh, at access champion on Twitter. And let's use the hashtag solve inspiration porn. Um, any one out there in fundraising. I'd really love to hear from you on this subject. Um, and again, let's use that hashtag solve inspiration porn. We're debuting a new segment this week called points to ponder, uh, Lew Michaels, who's an access champion in his own right.

Philip D. ([16:53](#)):

And one of my role models in the field is going to come at us, uh, from time to time, uh, with some thoughts on his mind, uh, having to do with access and inclusion, obviously. Uh, and, um, stay tuned after the interview to hear this new segment called points to ponder. Uh, before we get to the interview, we have just a quick shout out to this week sponsor. Today's episode is sponsored by Kaiser's Room, uh, hashtag imagine with Kaiser campaign Kaiser's room, uh, as a company here in New York city that provides opportunities for imagination and connection for individuals with cognitive and developmental disabilities through theater and dance. Uh, they're currently running a video challenge campaign through the first week of July to help raise money for their programming to make it more affordable, uh, for families, um, in the Tristate area. Uh, check it out at imaginewithkaiser.org or using the hashtag imagine with Kaiser now. Without further ado, access champion, Michelle Bishop

Speaker 1 ([18:15](#)):

[inaudible].

Philip D. ([18:15](#)):

All right. Uh, thanks Michelle for joining us on the access champions podcast.

Michelle Bishop ([18:23](#)):

Oh, thanks so much for having me. I'm so happy to be here.

Philip D. ([18:25](#)):

First of all, we want to thank you for again, for joining us, but, uh, it was really great. Um, this is probably one of our first really organic guests I would say, where, um, you know, we discovered, uh, the article you had written about about voting rights and then we're lucky enough to now have you on the, uh, on the podcast. So, uh, I really grateful for that. You know, we, we like to start the podcast interviews, uh, with a bit of an ordinance story to give everyone some context. Uh, you know, one of the things I love is that everyone who works in sort of the field of access and inclusion, uh, all tend to have really unique journeys. Uh, no one is the same for how they ended up in this field and doing this work. Um, so I'd love to hear, hear your journey, how you ended up here.

Michelle Bishop ([19:15](#)):

Oh, absolutely. Yeah, we all have a different journey, don't we? It's fascinating. This is, for me, working on the disability vote has really been my life's work. It's the only thing I've ever really done. Uh, when I started out in my career, I was a young and optimistic community organizer looking for work and I actually, this is a really random story, had applied for a job doing some work around employment as a community organizer and the position had been filled and, but it was still up on their website and they sent the position to a center for independent living, uh, in the area that I was living at the time and said, I know you guys are looking for a community organizer. Wanted to send this resume along. And they called me and it was to do work around the vote in the disability rights community and as fate would have it, I've always been a huge voting nerd my whole life. I,

Philip D. ([20:10](#)):

I'm going to need a little bit of context for that.

Michelle Bishop ([20:13](#)):

I have context for you. So the day I turned 18 I went to my public library because this was before there was such a thing as online voter registration. I went to my public library and I picked up the paper voter registration form and I filled it out and I returned it so that I would be a registered voter the day I was eligible and there were no elections that year. So I was just so stoked that I was eligible to vote and I couldn't wait to vote and I had to make sure I was registered like right away even though I had like at least a good year, year and a half before I was going to to you that. So this is always been me. And so

Philip D. ([20:50](#)):

you were the possibly the most proactive 18 year old in the history of 18.

Michelle Bishop ([20:56](#)):

If we could get all 18 year olds to be this excited about voting, it would just solve so many problems for those of us who work in the vote, I promise you. Um, but yeah, that was me. And so I said, absolutely. And so I just sort of fell into the disability rights piece of it, although it was a, a movement I was already familiar with, um, and I have a physical disability myself, so it kind of made sense, but it was an accident and then I just ended up here and, um, just really caught a fire for it. So I worked at a center for independent living for a long time, doing more like ground organizing around the vote. We were building a coalition of disability organizations all over the state that were getting people registered and educating about their rights and reminding them on the election dates, coming up, doing rides to the polls, the whole thing.

Philip D. ([21:40](#)):

And what state was this in?

Michelle Bishop ([21:42](#)):

And Missouri, Missouri. I lived in St Louis for a long time. Yeah. Yeah. So before I made the leap to DC, I'd sat as a good Midwesterner. I said I was never going to do it, and then here I am. So it's amazing. It was, it took everything to the next level. All the stuff we're doing in the States now. I get to look at it from a national perspective and help take those national trends and what's going on kind of across the U S and break it down piece by piece for the work that we're still doing on the ground. I just have to switch networks. They came from a center for independent living and now I work at the national disability rights network, which is a membership association for the protection and advocacy agencies. Um, but you know, very similar, very rights focused work in every state. So, um, I've been just extremely lucky. I found something early on in my career that I love doing and, uh, people have been paying me to do it for this long. So I, I, I'm incredibly blessed in that sense.

Philip D. ([22:40](#)):

For those of us who don't know the day to day of a disability, disability advocacy, uh, in voting rights, what does an average day look like for you in this world?

Michelle Bishop ([22:53](#)):

Every day is different in this work and that's one of the things that keeps it really exciting. The, the barriers that people with disabilities face are always shifting to an extent. It's a, it's been the same story for a very long time. Uh, the majority of Americans polling places have always been inaccessible and they still are. I, the last time the U S government accountability office looked at this, they found that 40% had no barriers for people with disabilities. So 60% had at least one barrier. So to an extent, there are some really longterm problems that probably should have been solved by now that we haven't. But the landscape is also always changing. The, like I said, online voter registration didn't exist when I was 18 and a super nerd and really excited about voting. But now that it does, are those accessible or are we creating a brand new barrier for people with disabilities in a system that was designed to break barriers down for people who want to vote?

Michelle Bishop ([23:54](#)):

Uh, polling places themselves. They're constantly shifting around, they're being moved, they're changing. The people who run elections are changing. And the way that they approach the work is always different. Building those relationships to make sure that we're working on these solutions together, the types of equipment that we're using to vote, um, and technology moves so fast that that's a really rapidly changing world. So I always say that access is a moving target because there's no, there's, you don't go through once and survey all the polling places and check them all and then say, boom, problem solved. Voting fully accessible for everyone. It's, it's a constantly changing landscape. And so we're constantly, um, moving in that direction, but then everything is sort of shifting under our feet or wheels depending on the person. And so it's, it's a constant, there's a constant fight there, um, to get that work done. I think we've made a lot of progress. And I think we're moving in a really good direction, but there's still just so much to be done.

Philip D. ([24:53](#)):

Absolutely. There always is. When you are addressing sort of individual polling places, do you guys provide trainings? What do you guys provide when you come in and to try to help a certain area become more accessible?

Michelle Bishop ([25:08](#)):

Well, I think the work is split up into a couple of different major components. Part of it is working with our elections administrators to kind of bring our expertise in disability access to the table. I will tell you, no one knows more about running elections than our elections administrators. Uh, it's a beast of a job and they're amazing at it. Uh, I'm impressed with the work that they do every day and I'm not envious at all. I'm really happy with my piece of the puzzle. I don't, I don't know if I want to be an elections administrator myself. It's really tough. Um, and they, no one knows more about it than they do. But increasingly our elections administrators are expected to be experts in so many different things and how we run elections and access for people with disabilities and things like cyber security and hacking.

Michelle Bishop ([26:00](#)):

And I don't, there's not a person who's going to know all those things. Yeah, that's, that's a really unrealistic expectation. So for us it's about saying you know, how to run elections and we know disability, so let's get together and see if we can solve some of these problems. And so we might go out and help survey a polling place and then take a look at are there, you know, some temporary same day modifications that can be made here to make this work better. Can we help you find somewhere to relocate it? Can we talk about how we can reconfigure it? You know, there's an accessible entrance over here that we're not using. Is there a path of travel is going to get you to that voting booth? It's talking with our elections administrators about the types of equipment that they're using in terms of actually casting your ballot.

Michelle Bishop ([26:41](#)):

What are you thinking about that voters are going to see when they go to the polling place? How are they setting up websites that provide information to voters and online voter registration systems? Kind of looking at that, um, and to end user process. What's every point in the system where people with disabilities might interact with the system and are we thinking about how to make it more accessible? And then I would say the other major piece of the work is actually speaking to the voters themselves, helping them to get registered, but also making sure that they know what their rights are when they go to vote. So when you go to your polling place, what should you expect to see? How should it be made accessible to you? What accommodations are you entitled to when you go to vote? So that the voters themselves are prepared to advocate for themselves and know what to ask for to make sure that the system's going to work for them.

Michelle Bishop ([27:27](#)):

Because you know this, every person with a disability is different. There are so many different types of disabilities and then each individual's experience of the same disability can be so different. And so there isn't really a one size fits all solution to how we make voting accessible. Part of it is making sure that we're making a really good decisions on how we run our elections and we're providing a good range of options to voters. But then the other piece of that is helping voters think through and make a plan on how am I going to vote? What do we need to be able to do that successfully? So the work is really broad. Uh, if you went to any one of the P and A's in any one of the States or territories and asked them what they were working on, you'd probably get a million different answers. It just is, um, it works best when

it's really suited to the context of what's going on in that state, what's going on in that jurisdiction, what does this individual voter need? Um, so the work can be complex, but it keeps it exciting and that's really, I think what makes it work. And why we've been so successful.

Philip D. ([28:24](#)):

Amazing. That attention to detail in that individualized approach, um, is incredibly important. The article that that brought us to you, um, was something that I'll say I was extremely ignorant about. Uh, and I consider myself relatively well versed in the field. Uh, but I, I did not know how tenuous the right to vote was. Um, specifically for the disability community. Can you talk us through a little bit of what's, what, what is going on and what hopefully what is, is being worked towards in that room?

Michelle Bishop ([28:56](#)):

Yes. And I think tenuous is a great word to describe the situation and I might steal that and use it so you look,

Philip D. ([29:06](#)):

it's fine. I'll give it to you

Michelle Bishop ([29:08](#)):

the next time you see my name and frame, you just, you go through and search for tenuous. I might have stolen it, but it is, it's a very precarious situation and you're not alone. I think that the majority of Americans aren't aware that this is something that's happening, um, or how problematic it is. Essentially people with disabilities are the last constituency in the United States that can have their right to vote, taken away based on their identity. When people, particularly with mental illness or intellectual disabilities are going to 18 and um, in the family is looking at establishing a guardianship or conservatorship to help that person. Do you know the things that we're normally concerned about when a person with disability turns 18 making healthcare decisions, managing their finances, things. So we, two things we could probably all use help.

Philip D. ([30:02](#)):

I mean, I could have used help with that at 18 shoot.

Michelle Bishop ([30:06](#)):

Well, some of that right now as a matter of fact. So I think that that's why people go to have a guardianship established. They're not thinking about voting, they're thinking about those types of practical day to day things. And in that process, in a number of States, you can be stripped of your right to vote by the judge if the judge decides that you're not competent to cast a ballot. And I think that that's horrifying. I think that any eligible Americans should be allowed to vote. And I think that, um, this judgment of competency is so subjective. Who's to say that someone who needs assistance managing their finances doesn't understand what it means to cast a vote or can't make a decision about who they want to vote for. And quite frankly, I'm sure anyone who's listening right now can think of a ton of non-disabled people who they think make terrible decisions about who they want to vote for.

Michelle Bishop ([30:55](#)):

I don't agree with them on my own family members, but when we don't have a disability, no one challenges us on our right to vote and they're not supposed to. Uh, that's the basis of our entire government taking away someone's right to vote is taking away their entire say on how their whole lives are going to be managed. So much of everything we interact with every day is determined by the political process. If you take away someone's right to have a say in that, you're just taking away their free agency, their personhood, and in that, that's a big deal. We shouldn't be doing that Willy nilly all over the country. And in the States where this type of thing is allowed, those determinations are made by the individual judges, which means it's not even just what state you live in, but County by County, whether or not this is something the judge does and some of them never check that box. And some of them check it as a matter of course for every guardianship that comes across their desk. And some of them really try to look at individuals and make a determination. But what on earth makes us think that our judges are qualified to make a determination about who's competent to vote? I'm not sure what expertise they necessarily have in that.

Philip D. ([32:01](#)):

So they're not even bringing in experts on that specific disability, say for, uh, maybe someone on the autism spectrum? No, they're not bringing in an OT or a BCBA or anything like that.

Michelle Bishop ([32:13](#)):

Uh, no. I mean they don't have to. They could, but they don't have to. That's a determination that's left up to the judge. Oh boy. And I think it, yeah, it's scary. Right. And I think it's a really basic misunderstanding of what it means to have a disability. And I think that's how we ended up here because you know, non-disabled people sometimes make these decisions and write these rules at the state level and thought, Oh yeah, if a person has a mental illness or they have an intellectual disability, you know, they have no idea what's going on. They don't know. They can't cast an educated vote. That is a complete misunderstanding of what it means to have a mental disability. That's just not how it works. Um, I, anyone I know who has an intellectual developmental disability can tell you exactly who they want to vote for and why.

Michelle Bishop ([33:00](#)):

And I can promise you their reasons are not any better or any worse than anyone else's. We live in a country where we elect presidents who when their poll for, who would you most like to have a beer with? So, you know, that's, this is how we do business as a country. For better or worse, this is where we're at. And so to say that some people because of the type of disability they have, just can't make an educated decision about who they want to vote for. Um, I think that those are the types of rules that are set up by people who don't know a lot of people with mental disabilities who don't understand what is it you're talking about. If you sat down and talked to all these people who are losing or potentially losing their right to vote in this process, these are people who are smart.

Michelle Bishop ([33:44](#)):

These are people who, you know, I said earlier, I think nobody knows elections better than our elections administrators. That's because it's their business. For a person with a disability, no one knows what they need better than they do. No one knows what you need better than you know yourself. And that is the basis of your vote. This is what I need. This is what I want to see happen. Which one of these candidates is telling me that that's a priority for them and how they're going to do it. And, and that's something that we all really are capable of making that determination for ourselves. So taking away someone's right to

vote, especially someone who has a guardian, especially someone who to a greater extent than adults who don't have guardians, is really at the mercy of the system. And, um, in participating in a lot of these, uh, programs that are determined by the political process to not have a say, that just seems wrong to me. If you are going to be a part of the system, you should have a say in how the system is run.

Philip D. ([34:45](#)):

Absolutely. Now, if for sweet, I know we do have listeners out there, um, who are individuals with disabilities and that that's a, uh, group of listeners. We're continuing to grow. Um, if they encounter a situation like this or if they're family members of someone who've, or friends of someone who encountered a situation like this, what is the best first step in, in, uh, looking to regain the, the right to vote?

Michelle Bishop ([35:10](#)):

So I would say the first thing you should probably do is talk to your guardian, talk to your guardian, and let's find out. First, there are situations in which, uh, people with disabilities come to us and they say, I want to vote, but I don't have the right to vote because I have a guardian. And you really need to look at that paperwork because we end up finding out that sometimes the, um, it depends on the state. You know, if it's only partial guardianship, you may not lose the right to vote or is there something in the paperwork specifying that you retain it? You may never have lost your rights to vote. We really to look at that paperwork and figure out did you indeed lose the right to vote? Cause it's confusing. And in there are some cases in which someone says, well, my mom is my guardian and so I don't have the right to vote and I want to get it back.

Michelle Bishop ([35:57](#)):

And we say, okay, let's take a look at the guardianship paperwork. And we find out mom never went to court and had a guardianship established. You don't actually illegally have a guardian and you've never lost your right to vote because you're actually your own guardian. It can happen. Um, just, you know, mom always called herself my guardian so we, you know, that's how we've always talked about it. Uh, that can happen. So you want to take a look and assess the situation and see did this person really lose the right to vote? And then I think it's, it's a process that it goes smoother when the guardian is on board. Right. If you talk to the guardian, say, I really want to be able to vote in the guardians in favor of that and the two of you can go back to the judge together and say, this is something we both want and think is right, it tends to go a lot smoother.

Michelle Bishop ([36:36](#)):

If there are any glitches in that process, if you hit any bumps in the road, I would definitely say you want to get in touch with the protection and advocacy agency in your state and talk to them about helping you advocate to get your right to vote back. They're easy to find. If you go to nprn.org national disability rights network and do your end.org, uh, on the right hand side, there's a little map of the United States and you click on it and it gives you a complete listing of all the P and A's. So if you don't know the one in your state, you can find it and get in touch with them and talk to them about helping you get your right to vote back. I, I encourage everyone, you know, it's not, it's not the end. Uh, if there's anyone who's listening who has yet to go through the process of having guardian established, knowing going in that this is something that can happen, it gives you the opportunity to prevent it, gives you and your future guardian the chance to say, we do not want this person to lose the right to vote, but if it's already happened, you can get it back.

Michelle Bishop ([37:34](#)):

It just might take a little bit of advocating, but it's worth it to have a say in your government. It's worth it.

Philip D. ([37:39](#)):

Absolutely. Um, that's fantastic. Um, and just to reiterate again, uh, for our listeners, N D R n.org, uh, is where you can find your local, um, agencies besides obviously this heavy undertaking to, to fix this problem that probably should have been fixed a long time ago. What else is going on in the world of voting rights? Uh, what's, what's, what's the current, um, undertakings that are, that are going on?

Michelle Bishop ([38:06](#)):

Well, that, that's another big issue. Everything, everything in the world of voting right now comes down to this cybersecurity stuff and all these accusations about hacking and it's, it's big and it's scary and it's confusing. Uh, there aren't any known demonstrated hacks of voting systems and votes being changed in our elections in 2016. I know there's a lot of talk about hacking. The only thing that we do know happened is that every state has an electronic database where they keep, who's registered to vote. And some people tried, different actors tried to get into those. Um, some of them were foreign hackers and some of them are domestic actors, but they tried to get into those and were detected and deterred. So there's a lot of talk about how we're going to make our elections more secure and I think that's really important. I think any voter should want to know that our votes are going to be counted accurately and fairly, and the results are going to be who the American people actually chose.

Michelle Bishop ([39:02](#)):

That said, a lot of the stuff that we're talking about in terms of making our elections more secure can also potentially make them less accessible. The big fix right now is to go back to everyone picking up a pen and hand marking a paper ballot, and that's just not something that works for everyone. There are a lot of people with different types of disabilities who just can't do that, not completely independently without any technology to assist them. So we're really doing a lot of debating and negotiating right now to talk about how we're going to make our election system is more secure without making them less accessible. We've come so far in the last 10, 15 years, the way, you know, you used to go to your polling place and you had to pick up that really little tiny like some tax thing and use it to punch the holes and the punch cards.

Michelle Bishop ([39:52](#)):

I think it was terrible. Um, it's not particularly accessible and it's really difficult for anyone to understand. It's really hard to make sure you've got it lined up right and know that you're hitting the right thing. What is that way? For a long time we ended up with all the pregnant CHADS hanging CHADS and all kinds of CHADS and everyone freaks out and that's actually a big threat to, to our democracy if we don't trust what happened, we don't trust the process and we don't trust the results. But we lived with that for a long time until the help America vote act came along and was passed and said that we're going to make this work for everyone, including making it accessible for people with disabilities. And that's why when you go to your polling place now there's going to be like a touchscreen and maybe it counts your vote for you directly or maybe you use the touchscreen.

Michelle Bishop ([40:36](#)):

It marks a piece of paper for you, but there was something that didn't exist before. We've come a really long way and taking a little bit our elections process and making sure it works for everyone to help America vote. Act says you have the right to vote privately and independently and that's really important. Everyone is supposed to be able to go to their polling place or their vote center or early voting or wherever it is you're going and they should be able to Mark the ballot. They should be able to verify the ballot, look at it and say, yes, the way this is marked is how I want it to be, and then cast it when I was at sliding it into the ballot box or whatever that means everyone is supposed to be able to do each of those three things. Mark verifying, cast that ballot with complete privacy and complete independence and we're not there yet.

Michelle Bishop ([41:16](#)):

We've come a long way and the more we talk about going back to those old school ways of voting in the name of making it more secure, the more we threatened to disenfranchise voters with disabilities. So it's a really big deal right now when we're talking about this a lot and I think we need voters with disabilities paying attention to these issues as well. Otherwise we might get some press, some surprises in our 2018 and 20, 20 elections when we go to our polling place and how we vote has been changed up and all those things that made it possible for us to vote privately and independently may have disappeared. So that's the, we're in the fight of our lives right now, I think over that. Um, and I hope that everyone is kind of watching these issues and making sure that the people who run their elections know how they feel about it.

Philip D. ([41:57](#)):

Uh, looking a little bit towards the, towards the future, um, what I obviously we'd like to see, uh, completely accessible polling places, uh, across the board. Uh, but what, what else would you like to see come coming down the pike? Oh wow. If I get a wishlist of whatever I want to see. Okay. If you can't dream on podcasts, where else can you dream?

Michelle Bishop ([42:20](#)):

I, that's cream point. Um, so I think I would ultimately like to see as a really shake things up and entirely rethink how we run elections. I think so much of the system is based on what made sense a really long time ago when we invented it before technology changed the way we live our entire lives. I don't think you should have to register before you go and vote. We have trays, ways of tracking people now, and we have ways of knowing, uh, if you're a us citizen without, you know, having to fill out an extra voter registration card, I think you should just be eligible to vote. You know, if you turn 18, you're otherwise eligible without having to take that extra step. I think that that would knock down barriers for a lot of people. Um, I love having a broad range of options for voters.

Michelle Bishop ([43:06](#)):

All voters seem to expect that these days. And they really love the new stuff that's coming out. They love early voting and things like that. Um, they like vote centers, they like the option to vote by mail, but they also still really love going to the neighborhood polling place on election day and getting in line with everyone else and getting your, I voted sticker. So I think that we should give the people what they want if we want them to vote. I also think that the more options we provide, the more accessible we can make it. Um, for some people getting a paper ballot mailed to their house and being able to mail it back is what makes it accessible for that. For some people going to the local neighborhood polling place, you know, at the end of the block and using the touch screen machine is what makes it accessible.

Michelle Bishop ([43:51](#)):

So let's, let's give people a broad range of options so that we can try to make it accessible and user-friendly and non-intimidating and not a burden for as many voters as possible. I think there's a lot of really interesting stuff on the horizon with completely changing the way we vote. There are companies right now that are developing ways of voting over the internet. There are companies that have mobile phone apps that you can download and vote on and they're trying them. The state of West Virginia just use them in their primary as a, as a pilot project. I think that would be really cool. Would it be, it would be great, right? If you didn't have to register and you could use your home computer or tablet or phone or whatever it is that you own that set up for you, how you need to be able to interact with it to make it accessible to you

Philip D. ([44:35](#)):

and so many of mobile devices are now the technology in them have become incredibly accessible. Yeah,

Michelle Bishop ([44:42](#)):

absolutely. I talked to a lot of people who work in the world of elections and I hold up my phone. I'm doing it right now, you can't podcast. But right now I'm holding up an iPhone eight with a bright yellow case on it and I hold it up and I say, this phone with this pineal screen is more accessible than most of the voting systems we're using today because Apple thought of new ways of designing. Everything invented that thing where you take two fingers and you spread them apart and it makes the screen zoom in and all of a sudden I can have the text any size I need it to be even on this tiny little screen. Uh, most of the voting systems we use right now were invented before tablets and smartphones even existed. You think about the fact that they're 10 15 years old and the iPhone 10 just came out.

Michelle Bishop ([45:24](#)):

They predate, they predate smartphones. So they're, they're just old technology. And I think that the technology we're developing today is going to change how we interact with everything tomorrow. And I think that at some point, the way we vote, it's going to have to kind of catch that wave. We tend to move a little slower in the voting world and it kind of makes sense. It's because we need it to be secure. Um, I think part of the reason more people voted for American idol back in the day and then they did for president was because they could do it from their living room on their phone.

Philip D. ([45:55](#)):

Oh, you better believe I voted for Justin Guarini from my, from my living room. Oh, he's a Philly boy, Kelly Kelly Clarkson for life. It clearly how things have worked out.

Michelle Bishop ([46:08](#)):

I'm still team Kelly. Right. She's awesome. So, but you know, if that was, I think there's a future in which, you know, you'd be sitting at home watching the debates or you'd see a campaign I'd come on and think, Oh yeah, have I voted yet? And do it right there while you're sitting there. I can imagine that world. And I think, um, whether we like it or not, it's coming. I think it'll just still be awhile because we have to make sure we can do it in a way that's secure. Yeah. You know, that's the big scary stuff. But I think that all those things, they're coming, there's people who are out there who are dreaming all this stuff up, who actually have the techno, how to make it happen, unlike me. Um, but it's, it's coming. And I think that the more that voters say what they want from their voting systems and they go tell their

elections officials and their elections officials, the people who actually spend the money on voting system, tell the people who make them, who want to get that money, what is it they, what it is that they want to see, the more innovation we're going to see happening over time.

Michelle Bishop ([47:06](#)):

So, you know, be vocal, be vocal about what you want and what would make it work for you to be able to vote. And I think that we'll start to see those things down the road.

Philip D. ([47:15](#)):

Amazing. Um, and then finally, uh, you know, what I always like to take the opportunity to do is give our guests an opportunity to, uh, kind of spread the love, um, and shine a light on. And anyone else or any other, um, that you think are doing important and interesting work. Um, if there's anybody that comes to mind, feel free to give them a little shadow.

Michelle Bishop ([47:38](#)):

I would love to do that. All right. I already mentioned them, but I have to do it again because I'm loyal. I think the protection advocacy agencies are amazing. Check out and [drn.org](#) to find your PNA. They're doing incredible work in the States. Uh, you know, also know I used to work for a center for independent living centers for independent living I think are just as amazing. They're national association. It's called nickel and C I L. Dot org. You should check that out as well. Um, a couple of really cool things that are happening in the world of disability vote that are kind of cutting edge. Um, I'm a really a big fan of the social media movement called hashtag Crip the vote, uh, which is kind of like the disability answer to rock the vote. Uh, you should check that out, especially if you use Twitter.

Michelle Bishop ([48:21](#)):

And if you do, you should follow me at Michelle votes, but check out hashtag Crip the vote. Uh, there is a national disability voter registration week that's coming up. Um, next month it's going to be the week of July 16th through the 20th, where there'll be events happening all over the country that are really focused on people with disabilities, getting registered to vote and educating themselves about their rights and what to expect when they go to the polls. A really disability specific thing, although we have some awesome partners and a lot of local libraries. Just really cool so that, that you should look for, uh, it was started by adapt, but it's being promoted right now by APD. If you go to [aapd.org](#) the American association of people with disabilities, they're doing some really amazing things with that. And with rev up, um, which stands for register, educate, vote, use your power.

Michelle Bishop ([49:15](#)):

I think that's right. I'm sorry if that's wrong guys. You're still the best. The rev up campaign, which is, which is, um, bringing more like disability. Get out the vote to your state, check it out. And they have some really cool swag as well. If you go to [aapd.org](#) can find that. Um, and of course I'm a big fan of national voter registration day. It's not a disability thing, but it's just really darn important. National voter registration day is the largest single day of voter registration in the United States. It happens annually and it's kind of designed to be, um, right before the, uh, the voter registration deadlines and all the States. So that's coming up. It should be September 25th. That sounds right to me. I hope, I hope I didn't get that one wrong either. Guys. That would be terrible.

Philip D. ([50:06](#)):

And any of these acronyms and or dates, uh, we, if they are incorrect, we will have them corrected on all the, uh, all the copy associated with the podcast. Do not worry.

Michelle Bishop ([50:17](#)):

It shouldn't be. I know it's the forest Tuesday in September, so I believe it should be Tuesday, September 25th. I'm pretty sure I'm spot on about that. National voter registration data or I feel confident about one. So those are just some of the things that are in there really easy to get involved in. If there's just some place you want to start, something you want to do, I would take a look at national voter registration day and rev up and national disability voter registration week and um, those have chances for getting involved and get engaged in your local community. Amazing.

Philip D. ([50:47](#)):

Well thank you again, Michelle for joining us. Um, and thank you for all of the work that you do. It's amazing. Um, it, it's important and hopefully our listeners now have a better idea of what still needs to be done. Um, and, and can sit back and think about how much, uh, we value our right to vote. Thank you again and thank you for being an access champion.

Michelle Bishop ([51:12](#)):

Thank you so much. Thank you for having me. Um, please go check us out. Get involved everyone. Don't forget to vote. Midterm elections this year are a big deal and I just appreciate the chance to come and talk about it with y'all. Thank you.

Philip D. ([51:25](#)):

Thanks again to Michelle for coming on the show and for all the worksheets. And the national center for disability rights is doing in the world of voting rights. Amazingly important work, especially given the current climate, uh, keeping this inclusion train rolling. Uh, let's dive into points to ponder with Lew Michaels. Lew is currently the director of operations for the Shubert theater up in new Haven, uh, and previously spent several years at Hartford stage. I've always appreciated Lew's candid and, and logical thinking. Um, and that's why I wanted to bring his voice to the podcast. So without further ado, points to ponder.

Lew M. ([52:03](#)):

I'm Lew Michaels and this is points to ponder parking lots, accessibility. Do they even go hand in hand? Parking can be a nightmare all by itself. Pulling into a parking lot at your favorite store, only to have to loop around. And then when you think you see a spot, it's one of those cart corral things. And let's be honest, that just screams, don't push your cart here worse than that is when you have to go into full shark mode, as I call it. You know, where you find yourself looping around a parking lot, stalking a spot, like it's your prey. Then all of a sudden you see someone's brake lights or a person leaving the store. You might sit and wait or slowly roll as you block the rest of the aisle with your blinker on. Bingo. A person opening the trunk. This is it. A good distance from the door, a good sized spot.

Lew M. ([52:57](#)):

It's amazing. As you wait there with your blinker on so that everybody knows you've claimed this spot as your own. You begin cursing the person that's about to give you the spot. As they unload their child and a cart full of items into the car. You sit there telling other cars that slowly drive by as you were just doing. You better not stop. This is my spot. Then after what seems like an eternity, but it's really just

seconds. The person backs out and you pull in. Wow. That was a lot of work to get one of 200 spots at the store matching what it's like for the person looking for an accessibility spot. Searching for that one of only 10 spots available. They find the van accessible spot they need so they pull in, but wait, the person who pulled in next to them in that parking spot, you know the one next to those striped lines which they thought was some sort of landing zone area for their car.

Lew M. ([54:04](#)):

Now the person can open their side door but can't deploy the ramp that they need to get out. It always amuses me that people see the extra space between spots. Again, you know that strike line area and think to themselves, Oh this must be where I drop off my cart right here in the middle. Even though they saw one of those cart corrals when they were circling, but no, this is where they choose to leave their cart because it's more convenient for them. Convenient for who not the person looking to use the accessible spot as it was intended. As they say in the subway system, mind the gap, that extra area around an accessible parking spot, it's not a neutral zone where the first one to claim it gets it. It's there. So people who need the extra space in the accessible spot have it to use it, so yes, mind the gap.

Lew M. ([54:59](#)):

Keep it clear. Oh, I'm mad at accessible parking spaces are not a holding area. It drives me nuts. When I pull into a lot and I see a mom or a dad, a husband or a wife just idling in the nearest accessible spot, no tag, nothing, identifying that they need the spot, which of course would be fine. Rather they're just there idling as they wait for the person inside to run in. Grab a bag of flaming hot Cheetos and who knows what else and come back out. The other thing I must've missed the memo on was the hours the accessible parking spots are accessible parking spots. You see, I thought they were always accessible parking spots, but it appears to me sometimes that at a certain hour placard or not, they become open to the world and you can just take it. What I'm really talking about here is common courtesy, courtesy to your fellow man, woman or child. Surely that can't be too much to ask. This has been Lew Michaels with points to ponder

Alie B. ([56:07](#)):

and there you have it folks. Our second episode of ACP rewind is in the books. We are so grateful that Michelle could join us and give us a little update, let us know how things are going. We are just so thankful for her work and her tireless efforts in the field of access and inclusion. Michelle, thank you. Thank you, thank you and to all of you our listeners, thank you for tuning in today and as always, if this conversation left you curious and wanting more or wanting to grow your access knowledge, come find us on Patron. For as little as a dollar a month, you'll have access to bonus interviews, content swag, and more www.patron.com/access champions. As always, I want to thank our incredible team, our executive producer, Matt, for his hard work that he puts into every podcast. Big shout out to Phil for being the brains of the operation. His work in the field of access and inclusion does not go unnoticed. He is a true champion and hero, thanks to Jay, our intern, and for all his work across social media lines. Thanks to Justin Campbell for the artwork, Tommy Carr for logos, Eric and Austin for our awesome and Epic music. And of course, ms Kelsey Rose Brown for her amazing drawings and illustrations. We will be back again soon to have some more access champions podcast rewind episodes. So stay tuned for updates and more. And as always, inclusion believers. Never stop running through that brick wall.