

## Discrimination at polling sites illegal

The editorial on Sept. 15, "Voters, try out new machines," reported \_ incorrectly \_ voters will get to try optical scanners this November. There are no certified optical scanners available for use in New York state this year. The author is correct in saying the new machines, ballot marking devices or BMDs, can be used by anyone. BMDs allow a voter to indicate his or her choices by filling in a ballot using the accessible features that best suit the individual. After the choices are made, the BMD then prints out the ballot, which, according to the procedures written by New York State Board of Elections, gets counted at the polling site directly after the close of polls. BMDs only mark ballots; they cannot count votes.

The Sept. 18 correction made by Mr. Nicols, Otsego County Democratic Elections commissioner, further confuses the issue. Mr. Nicols says, "any voter may use the new machines," but then indicates BMDs will "be set up only for handicapped use." Deciding who votes on which machine is called segregation and is illegal. Will poll workers ask voters who want to use the BMD whether they have a disability? That is illegal.

Voters across the state reported BMDs in their polling sites on Primary Day were placed "over in a corner," set up with "no privacy screen," "not even plugged in" or "still covered." Mr. Nicols' idea of reducing delays by discrimination is appalling and is most likely a dodge to cover up the reality that most poll workers are not adequately trained on the BMD or informed of appropriate procedures.

New York has had several years to prepare for this change. Machine manufacturing delays and drawn-out certification procedures aside, there is no excuse for this ignorance to continue.

Helen Benlisa

Oneonta

Benlisa is the Project HAVA coordinator for the Catskill Center for Independence.