

Promote the Vote, Protect the Vote

Accessibility and Voting

Accessibility means ensuring voters with disabilities have equal access to voter registration and polling places. Individuals with disabilities face many barriers to casting a ballot. Although the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) mandates accessibility in all public accommodations and the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) mandates that all polling places to have at least one accessible voting system, many polling places are still inaccessible to voters with disabilities. A study by Rutgers University found that 30.1 percent of disabled voters had difficulties voting in the 2012 election. The nonpartisan Government Accountability Office conducted a comprehensive study of 167 randomly selected polling places in 2016 and found that 83 percent of polling places had impediments to voting.

Voter Registration

The ADA mandates that all aspects of the voter registration process be accessible to individuals with disabilities. The National Voter Registration Act of 1993 (NRVA) requires all state funded programs that primarily serve individuals with disabilities to provide voter registration assistance. If the state services are provided at an individual's home, voter registration services must be provided at the individual's home as well.

Read "Federal Laws Protecting the Rights of Voters with Disabilities" here:

https://www.ada.gov/ada_voting/ada_voting_ta.htm

Casting a Ballot

Building Accessibility

Accessible buildings enable individuals with disabilities to easily vote. Accessible polling places have features such as pathways that are clear of objects, cracks, and bumps, ramps or elevators to accommodate those who cannot climb stairs, and entryways that are wide enough for wheelchairs. Polling places without these features impede many people from voting because they cannot enter or navigate the building and its surrounding areas. Inaccessible buildings disenfranchise voters by preventing individuals with disabilities from voting.

See "ADA Checklist for Polling Places from the Department of Justice" here:

<https://www.ada.gov/votingchecklist.htm>

Accessible Voting Machines

Accessible voting machines enable individuals with a physical, psychiatric, or intellectual disability to vote easily. These machines use clear language, have visual aids, include an audio ballot and

a Braille handheld keypad, and are accessible for individuals in wheelchairs. These accommodations must not compromise an individual's right to a secret and independent ballot.

See a detailed description of accessible voting methods here:

<http://sfgov.org/elections/voting-accessible-touchscreen-voting-machines>

Additional Barriers to Voting

A lack of training could prevent individuals from voting — thus, all poll workers should receive training on using accessible voting machines so they can assist with questions or difficulties. Additionally, long wait times may impede those who cannot stand for long periods from voting. Poll workers can accommodate such people by providing chairs or moving them ahead in the line if possible.

Remedies

There are remedies to pursue if individuals with disabilities face issues registering to vote or casting a ballot. The US government has various reporting mechanisms, including the US Department of Justice, US Civil Rights Commission, and the US Election Assistance Commission.

For state and local resources, call or visit the website of your state boards of elections and/or county election commissioner. Last, call 866-OUR-VOTE or visit www.866ourvote.org, a national voting rights hotline, with all voting issues and questions.