

ASSISTING VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES AND ELDERLY VOTERS ON ELECTION DAY

A Guide for Poll Workers

Equal Treatment to All Voters

As Americans with disabilities increasingly participate in the activities of their communities, more citizens want to vote in person at the polls rather than use absentee ballots. To assist election officials, poll workers, and disability organizations cooperating with them, this informational handout is provided with suggestions for making voting easier for all those concerned. Listed below are suggested common courtesies, guidelines, and a few adaptations at polling places that will make them more accessible.

Common Courtesies and Guidelines

- Be considerate of the extra time it might take for a person who has a disability or who is elderly to get things done, and give undivided attention to a person who has difficulty speaking.
- Speak directly to the person who has a disability rather than to the person that may be accompanying him/her.
- Speak calmly, slowly, and directly to a person with a hearing problem. Your facial expressions, gestures, and body movements help in understanding. Don't shout or speak in the person's ear. If full understanding is doubtful, write a note to the person with a hearing problem.
- Before pushing someone in a wheelchair, ask if you may do so and how you should proceed.
- Greet a person who is visually impaired by letting the person know who and where you are. Provide a guiding device such as a ruler or card for signing forms. When offering walking assistance, allow the person to take your arm or shoulder and tell him or her if you are approaching steps or inclines.
- Be aware that dogs that assist people with disabilities should be admitted into all buildings. Such dogs are highly trained and need no special care other than that provided by the owner.
- Be aware that federal law allows voters with disabilities to be accompanied and to receive assistance by another person in the voting booth.
- Remember that all voters deserve courteous attention in exercising their right as citizens to vote.

Suggestions for Making Polling Places Accessible

- Use temporary signs to identify accessible parking and directions to an accessible entrance for people with disabilities, if different from the entrance used by other voters.

- Use a temporary ramp if your voting place has steps at the entrance, but be sure the slope of the incline meets ADA requirements.
- If your polling place has heavy doors, someone should be available to assist those who need help. Often a simple adjustment may remedy the problem.
- A 32" clearance at non-revolving doors will enable a person using a wheelchair to enter the building.
- Smooth and hard floor surfaces or those covered with a tightly woven carpet with no pad or a thin pad are best for wheelchair users and others.
- Clearance space beneath a table surface should be twenty-seven inches high, thirty inches wide, and nineteen inches deep.
- Printed instructions will be helpful for persons who are hearing impaired to vote. Printed instructions in simple large lettering placed in each voting booth will aid persons who are visually impaired.
- Booths with accessible ballot marking machines should be placed near scanners.
- At least one accessible voting booth should be available to allow voting from a seated position.
- Place a magnifier in each voting booth for use by those with impaired vision.
- Place pen and paper on registration tables for use in communicating with voters who are hard of hearing or who have speech impediments. Place signature templates on registration tables for use by blind voters.