**Your Vote Matters: The Voting Rights of People with Disabilities**

Educational video brought to you by Disability Rights Texas

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The right to vote. We’re told it’s our privilege and our duty as American citizens. Our chance to use our voice about what we believe is best for ourselves and the people of our country.

Yet over the years, only about half or less of United States citizens eligible to vote did so in presidential elections. Though the reasons vary, we know some of the people who have not voted include people with disabilities who faced barriers when attempting to vote or register to vote.

In 2002, Congress passed the Help America Vote Act to make the voting process more inclusive and accessible. That means that if you are a person with a disability, you have specific legal rights regarding voting.

1. First of all, you have the right to register to vote. So where can you register to vote? Under the law, state agencies that provide assistance to people with disabilities must offer you the opportunity to register to vote. Some of these agencies include the Department of State Health Services, the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, the Texas Workforce Commission, the Texas Department of Transportation, and many other state offices.

If you have not been offered the opportunity to register to vote at government offices such as these, please call the DRTx Voting Rights Hotline at 1-888-796-VOTE (8683).

Certain individuals may not be eligible to vote. This applies to many people who are under full guardianships. Some people who are under limited guardianships may have the right to vote unless a judge specifically orders that they cannot vote.

1. Another one of your voting rights as a person with a disability requires that polling places where you cast your vote must be accessible, meaning you can enter and exit the building without obstacles. Requirements include:

* The voting area is located on the first floor or accessible by an elevator
* Entrance and exit doors and elevator doors meet certain width requirements
* Parking area has curb cuts and a ramp to the entrance
* Stairs and ramps have handrails
* Ramps are non-slip
* There are no barriers in the path of a voter with a disability.

1. You also have the right to cast a ballot privately and independently.

You do not have to provide proof of your disability to poll workers, and it is illegal for anyone to ask you what your disability is.

Every polling place in Texas, including early voting sites, must have at least one voting machine that has accessibility features which allows voters with disabilities to mark ballots on their own in private. Voting machines come with assistive features for people with visual or physical impairments

Also, if you cannot read or write or if you have a disability that prevents you from reading or marking the ballot, you have the right to ask someone to help you.

You can ask a friend to help you vote, or you can ask the election officials to help you with part or the entire ballot depending on your needs.

You can choose anyone you want to help you, except your employer, an agent of your employer, or an officer or agent of your union.

The person helping you must take an oath that he or she will not try to influence your vote and will mark your ballot as you tell them to.

The person may not tell anyone how you voted.

1. If you do not understand the language being spoken in the polling place or you do not understand the language that the ballot is written in, you have the right to an interpreter.

You can select any registered voter from your county to be your interpreter.

If you cannot read the languages on the ballot, your interpreter can translate the ballot for you in the voting booth.

If you are deaf and cannot bring someone to interpret for you, call your county prior to the day you vote to request an interpreter. Contact the Texas Secretary of State Election Divisions Office at 1-800-252-VOTE (8683) for the number to call in your county. DRTx recommends calling your county to make your request at least 48 hours in advance of the day you vote.

If your county will not provide an interpreter or fails to provide an interpreter, please call the DRTx Voting Rights Hotline at 1-888-796-VOTE (8683) for assistance.

1. Rather than voting in person, you have the right to use one of the following alternative voting methods.

**Curbside voting** is available during Early Voting and on Election Day. If you are physically unable to enter the polling place, you may ask that an election officer bring a ballot to you at the entrance of the polling place or to a car at curbside.

After you mark the ballot, give it to the election officer who will place it in the ballot box. Or, at your request, a companion may hand you a ballot and deposit it for you.

It is recommended that you call your county’s election official ahead of time to let them know what time you will be at your polling site. Call the Texas Secretary of State Election Divisions Office at 1-800-252-VOTE (8683) to find out the phone number for your county.

Another way to vote is to vote by mail. Instead of going to the poll to vote on Election Day, if you are a registered voter, you can apply to vote by mail. Only certain people, including people with disabilities, can get approved to vote by mail.

Once you receive notice that your application is approved, a ballot will be mailed to you. After marking the ballot, you will mail it back to the county clerk to be counted.

You must reapply once a year to vote by mail.

In addition to your specific voting rights as a person with a disability, there’s some other information that we think you may find helpful.

For instance, if you find it difficult to vote at your assigned polling place on Election Day, you may choose to vote at a more convenient time and location by participating in Early Voting. You can vote early in person during the early voting period, which begins 17 days before Election Day and ends four days before Election Day. You can vote at any early polling place in your county.

Also, you have the right to complete a provisional ballot if there is any question about your eligibility to vote. Your ballot will be counted once election officials determine you are entitled to vote.

Do you feel like your voting rights have been violated due to any of the following reasons?

* You were told you cannot register to vote because of your disability
* You were not able to enter or exit the polling site because of your disability
* You faced barriers inside the polling place that limited your ability to vote or prevented you from voting
* You did not receive assistance that you needed from poll workers to operate the voting device to be able to cast your ballot
* You were not allowed to vote
* Any other reason that prevented you from voting

If you experience any of these situations or believe your rights were violated in any other way while voting, there are several things you can do:

* Immediately tell the election judge at the polling site about your issue
* Contact your county elections official
* Contact the Texas Secretary of State Election Divisions Office at 1-800-252-VOTE (8683).

Contact the Disability Rights Texas Voter Rights toll-free hotline at 1-888-796-VOTE (8683) and a member of our voting rights team will assist you. Please have the name and address of the polling location available, and a description of how you felt your rights were violated.

As a United States citizen, you have the right to vote, and as a person with a disability, you have other specific rights intended to assist in exercising your right to vote. Disability Rights Texas is available to help. Please call us if you need assistance or have questions about your voting rights. Thank you.